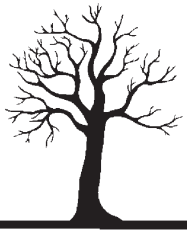
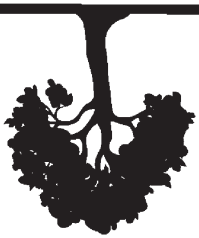
HOW TO BE ACCOUNTABLE



Take Responsibility to Change Your Behavior, Boundaries & Relationships



JOE BIEL

author of *Good Trouble: Building a Successful Life & Business with Autism*

& FAITH G. HARPER, PHD, LPC-S, ACS, ACN

Wall Street Journal bestselling author of *Unfuck Your Brain* & *Unfuck Your Intimacy*

Microcosm Publishing

Portland, Ore

HOW TO BE ACCOUNTABLE

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR, BOUNDARIES & RELATIONSHIPS

© 2020 Joe Biel and Faith G Harper
© This edition Microcosm Publishing 2020
First edition - 5,000 copies - 11/11/2020
ISBN 9781621062363
eBook ISBN 9781621064428
This is Microcosm #472
Cover and illustration by Lindsey Cleworth
Edited by Sarah Koch

To join the ranks of high-class stores that feature Microcosm titles, talk to your local rep: In the U.S. COMO (Atlantic), FUJII (Midwest), BOOK TRAVELERS WEST (Pacific), TURNAROUND in Europe, UTP/MANDA in Canada, NEW SOUTH in Australia, and GPS in Asia, Africa, India, South America, and other countries. We are sold by GIFTS OF NATURE in the gift trade.

For a catalog, write or visit:
Microcosm Publishing
2752 N Williams Ave.
Portland, OR 97227
www.Microcosm.Pub

Did you know that you can buy our books directly from us at sliding scale rates? Support a small, independent publisher and pay less than Amazon's price at www.Microcosm.Pub

Global labor conditions are bad, and our roots in industrial Cleveland in the 70s and 80s made us appreciate the need to treat workers right. Therefore, our books are MADE IN THE USA.

Numerous contributions were made by a broad community through openly sharing their stories and experiences for this book. We are eternally grateful to the wisdom and genorosity of those who have thought long and hard, while working intensively on these issues that affect literally every living person.

This book is dedicated to Rubine Red, Joe's service dog, who passed away after eight years of working, during the final stages of writing this book.

MICROCOSM PUBLISHING is Portland's most diversified publishing house and distributor with a focus on the colorful, authentic, and empowering. Our books and zines have put your power in your hands since 1996, equipping readers to make positive changes in their lives and in the world around them. Microcosm emphasizes skill-building, showing hidden histories, and fostering creativity through challenging conventional publishing wisdom with books and bookettes about DIY skills, food, bicycling, gender, self-care, and social justice. What was once a distro and record label was started by Joe Biel in his bedroom and has become among the oldest independent publishing houses in Portland, OR. We are a politically moderate, centrist publisher in a world that has inched to the right for the past 80 years.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 7

WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? 15

WHAT ACCOUNTABILITY IS NOT 21

Accountability Vs. Punishment 22

Lucas' Story 27

WHAT CAUSES UNWANTED BEHAVIOR 31

Why Is Accountability So Difficult 40

Heuristics and Biases 41

Classic CBT Coming in Hot And Spicy47

Threat Assessments and Trauma Responses 48

Relational Influences 52

Susceptibility to Propaganda 55

In Conclusion 57

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR 59

Working with Our Reactions in the Immediate 61

Training Ourselves to Think 64

Maybe She's Born with It, Maybe It's Bullshit Propaganda 71

UNPACKING OUR OWN HISTORY 75

Unfucking Our Mental Health Paradigm: Power Threat Meaning (PTM) 75

Unpacking Your Past 79

Unpacking Now 81

List of Potential Traumas 82

WORKING WITH THE SHADOW 91

Shadow Work Questions for Introspection 93

Shadow Work Meditation 94

CREATING AN ACTION PLAN 97

Accountability Goal Setting 99

The Accountability WOOP 102

Therapy, Coaching, Mentoring, and Accountability Partnerships 104

ATONEMENT, FORGIVENESS, AND REPENTANCE: ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION 109

The Failed Apology 113

A Better Way 114

Now It's Our Turn: The Three R's of an Apology 115

I Can't Seem to Forgive MYSELF, Though 117

HANDLING CONFLICT 121

Conflict is Not Abuse 131

Conflict Affects Everyone 134

Four Levels of Communication 136

Communicating with I Statements 138

Talking Conflict Out in 6 Easy-ish Steps 139

BIFF Statements 142

Talking Out Conflict 146

The Opposite of Cancel Culture: Inviting In Versus Calling Out 150

COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY 155

Resolution 168

FUTURE (ACCOUNTABLE) YOU 177

CONCLUSION 186

REFERENCES 188

ABOUT THE AUTHORS 191

INTRODUCTION

Accountability is the ownership of your choices and behaviors and the impact they have on the world, regardless of your intent. Accountability is aligning your patterns of behavior to your values.

When it comes down to it, people don't resist change. We resist *being* changed. Accountability cannot be bestowed upon us by someone else, no matter how well meaning they are or how much we love them. We have to be worn down enough by the toxic patterns in our lives to decide *we* want to do something about it.

Maybe your accountability is something individual. You've cheated on a partner or assaulted someone. Perhaps you want to stop feeling like a burden on your roommates. Or you want to stop smoking. Maybe you're always missing deadlines at work or don't like to have serious conversations about your relationship with your partner. Maybe every time someone argues with you on the Internet you threaten to kill their dog. Maybe you want to create a daily exercise routine or live a life of purpose and meaning. Maybe you're an angry drunk who yells at your friends.

Or maybe it's more systemic than your direct interpersonal relationships. Perhaps you're coming to grips with something large and systemic like the racism, homophobia, transphobia, and prejudice that has been fed to so many of us in modern society and you want to address them so you can be a proactive ally.

No judgement of your issue or issues; you're not alone in having made decisions you regret. All that matters is that you want to change something and you're here.

So let's face *why* you're here. Most people aren't ready to be accountable until they've either hit rock bottom or alienated someone from their life that they deeply care about. Maybe your partner gave you an ultimatum or you realized that your drinking is keeping you from the things that you care about or maybe your community is coming after you with pitchforks. It's scary. It's real. You've successfully avoided responsibility up until now by promising to do better and/or making temporary changes. But now you have to put your money where your mouth is. One thing that's important to realize is that it may be too late to heal those particular relationships. ***So do this work for yourself, not for other people or for specific relationships.***

Weirdly, the thing that very few books on the subject will tell you is that most human relationship behavior is just maladaptive stuff from your earlier life experiences. You didn't know how to get your needs met, so you figured out some clunky workarounds that, in adulthood, cause worse and worse damage each time you attempt them. Basically something went haywire at some point and you created coping behaviors that don't actually fulfill your relational needs in the long term. Needs like authentic, mutual, and healthy connections.

Everyone—including ourselves—has done things that they aren't proud of. We'll have confession time periodically throughout this book about our own fuckery. Throughout the text, when you see "I," it's Joe talking. When Faith is talking, we'll simply use her name.

I grew up as an undiagnosed autistic person, fumbling through the world in the dark with a light switch nowhere in sight. I wasn't given much in the way of moral guidance as a child and I developed a lot of coping mechanisms that were not effective at fulfilling my own needs, nor particularly kind to the people around me.

These coping skills got me through at the time, but didn't serve to support healthy relationships as I got older. So I needed to build new habits, instead of relying on old ways of being.

I was raised by my mom because my dad was confined to a wheelchair with his speech unrecognizably slurred. Our home was ruled by violence and confusion. Faith would refer to this as an avoidant-fearful attachment style if we are going to use clinical language. I witnessed my mother overtly lie to me about both benign and important things alike while also keeping secrets that deeply affected me. I internalized the idea that you don't have to open up about even the most important things. As I grew up, I watched other kids form friendships and develop emotional bonds while I noticed them increasingly avoid me. I eventually came to the realization that hiding intimate details of my life led people to distrust me. Coupled with my own maladaptive behavior, as an autistic person, my brain's mirror neurons are incapable of detecting when someone is attempting to subtly or nonverbally communicate a boundary. People around me would perceive me as inflexible and disrespectful of their boundaries even after they had expressed them. I found myself alone.

After the end of a number of long-term relationships that I thought were deep, I finally came to understand that people were communicating so much to me nonverbally. And they thought I was ignoring them. I spent years consciously working to learn the signs of other people's expressions and how to respond to them. By the time I found myself in my first healthy, loving relationship at 30 years old, I understood that I could share openly and trust someone for the first time in my life. I always knew that *lying* was wrong but it didn't occur to me that *withholding* was a form of dishonesty as well. Autistic brains can be confused by gray areas. But when I learned what was needed of me and made the decision to change, I started recognizing my own

toxic patterns. I saw how withholding affected my life. I apologized to dozens of people that I had (however inadvertently) hurt in my past. I made a conscious decision to share *everything*, even things that made me look foolish or might upset someone. I internalized the understanding that *clear is kind*. Suddenly, I was the person that I wanted (and needed) to be.

Dr. Faith is a trauma therapist. In working with both victims and perpetrators, she has noticed similarities in their experiences. Many individuals who have offended recognize that they harmed themselves in the process of victimizing others. They have acted in ways that they have to live with for the rest of their lives, and in many cases have caused damage that can be healed but not repaired. It is the recognition of this harm that they need to work through.

Additionally, Faith recognizes that most perpetrators were victims of harm far before they caused harm to others. Not always, of course, but often. This means deep accountability work needs to take all of the complexities of our experiences of trauma into account, though most pundits may say otherwise. So this book endeavors to address all of these complexities in a way that you don't often see in the public sphere, or even in accountability literature.

As each of us began to write more and more about trauma, healing, and accountability, readers started reaching out requesting specific assistance on changing the behaviors they developed as a result of their traumatic histories. I received a lot of responses from autistic people seeking mentorship relationships. Four years later I've found coaching younger people to be a satisfying (albeit painful) way to revisit all of the mistakes I learned the hard way.

We didn't intend to write this book but as we began looking for resources that could help people seeking this information, we found

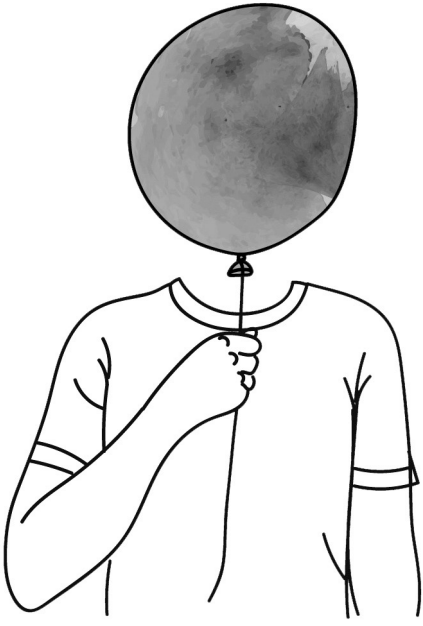
hundreds of books depicting the horrific acts of others and hundreds more detailing various ways that the author has been mistreated, but we found virtually nothing about how to end this cycle of abuse. People weren't asking us for first-person trauma porn narratives; they've already lived them. They were looking to change themselves.

There are some survivorship based books that are structured for understanding relationship dynamics. While bell hooks' *All About Love* is the classic treatise on the subject and Lundy Bancroft's *Why Does He Do That?* offers a great support structure for survivors, there is remarkably little written about how to recognize and change patterns in our *own* behavior, which seems to suggest that change is only needed for people whose behavior is unfathomably worse than our own. But the reality is that *everyone* sees maladaptive behaviors in themselves that they'd like to change. While most discussions of accountability talk extensively about how to attempt to impose it on others, we can only control our own behavior, understand how it impacts others, make informed decisions about who to allow into our lives, and learn how to be accountable to ourselves.

The only person you have control over is yourself. More and more people are recognizing this truth and reaching out for resources in a pretty resource-scarce market. So we took it on, which made us quickly realize that doing the topic justice is really difficult and there's probably a damn good reason no one else wanted to. Judging people and "cancelling" people is a way easier story to sell. Being flawed people grumpily doing difficult work, trying to support others doing the same, is really, really tough.

We too are flawed people who only got here through our own quests to do better. "Here" being the space of continuously working. Not done. Still flawed as fuck. The first steps are admitting it, recognizing it, making a decision to change the course of the behavior,

and then creating a workable plan to make that happen. From there, you'll find that your shame withers, you have greater control over your life, you'll start to see yourself differently, and you'll establish a new way of interacting with the world.



WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

This bears repeating: Accountability is t*he ownership of our choices and behaviors and the impact they have in the world, regardless of intent*. It is similar to responsibility, but the fundamental difference is responsibility can be shared while accountability is confined to one individual.

Accountability means we claim our own actions. It's the willingness, or self-propelled obligation, to accept responsibility for and repair the harm we cause. It's not blaming someone else or explaining away things we did as justified. It's acknowledging one's own power and behavior and making a demonstrable effort to change the problematic patterns from which we have been operating. At its heart, accountability is the skillset to identify and make positive changes within ourselves without others having to point it out.

Accountability means understanding that our actions do not always have the intended impact. We may screw up. Accountability also means looking at how our short-term strategies don't always align with our long term values. We may work to fulfill our wants instead of our needs and may alienate people that we care about.

The steps are accepting these truths, working toward repair, and learning how to prevent patterns from forming or continuing in the future. Sometimes this is as simple as getting to know yourself, admitting your mistakes, and apologizing. Sometimes it's a years-long process to understand your motivations and behaviors in order to change your outward expressions and patterns.

Before we get started, it needs to be said that accountability work is difficult. People in twelve-step recovery know how difficult this work is. In those programs, steps 4-6 are "make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves," "admit the exact nature of our wrongs," and "remove all these defects of character." These steps are really about accountability, aren't they? And that's probably why relapse is so common during this period. It's difficult work to undertake. . . digging into our own shit.

Most of the time, we think about accountability in a social context. Stealing money from work, never being the one to do the dishes, lying to a friend (yes, lies of omission count!), making a mistake that led to someone else getting in trouble, pressuring a partner into having sex when they aren't interested, or murdering a stranger on the street are all decisions and actions that require accountability, albeit dramatically different kinds. The greater the harm, the more difficult the resolution. These are all behaviors that may have an institutional level of accountability tied to them, the things we think of as "rules" and "laws." But consequences from external forces may not be what motivates us. We need our own moral compass—not just fear of retribution—to guide us.

If you have harmed someone or a group, you have to repair that harm. Changing your behavior alone isn't enough to restore how others see us. If you spent a year stealing everyone's lunch at work, simply ceasing to pilfer those lunches isn't going to repair that trust. You need to "address the exact nature of your wrongs." You need to genuinely apologize without justifying your behavior. "I'm sorry. I didn't have any money for lunch so I stole yours," is the opposite of an apology. It's a justification. It's doubling down against their hurt feelings. A real apology contains remorse, followed by silence and changed behavior. It's about letting other people talk and hearing

them. It's less about telling others how we've changed than it is about acknowledging our wrongdoing and making a resolution to work on ourselves. It's about looking inside and addressing what caused you to hurt someone you care about.

Often when we've done something that we are ashamed of, we approach our admissions and apologies with half truths, lies of omission, or outright dishonesty. It's a form of dealing with the weed that has broken through the soil, rather than the root system from which it sprung forth. Faith can tell you that the rest of the story almost always comes out later, and the lying almost always destroys trust more than the original harmful act. It may "save" you in the short term, but not forever.

Defensiveness about unintended consequences is also to be avoided. "I ran your car into the light pole but I didn't mean to" is frustratingly unhelpful. Even if you add a "sorry" somewhere in the mix. The presumption is that you didn't mean to, right? Intentionally running a borrowed car into a light pole was not on your agenda. . . was it?

This kind of half-assed accountability doesn't encourage true healing. So we're going to encourage you to go deeper and to think about how your actions or words impacted the other person, particularly if your actions spanned a substantial period of time. If you argue with your partner about why they are wrong every time they tell you what they need from you, focus instead on listening. Focus on apologizing. Focus on hearing the nuts and bolts of their requests and committing them to memory. Show how you have changed instead of telling people that you have. Look at ways that your personal healing can shape community atonement. (page 171).

Most people inherit a lot of baggage, ideologies about responsibility, and cultural notions of "right and wrong" from their family of origin. For example, even if your family members are terrible at getting along with each other, if getting along with each other is a value of the family, then the adult children will often continue prioritizing getting along with their dysfunctional family. They might even go as far as to impose those values and their concomitant behaviors on others (who to vote for and who to pray to are big ones. . . as is the relationship paradigm of avoiding disagreements with adult partners at all costs). This is one reason why you need to figure out what is best for *you* instead of letting someone else choose your priorities. Own *your* shit, not theirs!

Being an adult is shedding all of this baggage and making your own choices for what's best for you. And dealing with the consequences.

None of this is to suggest that the process of changing behavior is easy. Indeed, if it was, you likely would have done so by now. You need to take a full and honest look at yourself, the behaviors that were modeled within your family, what was reinforced by other influences, and how you have adapted to cope with these influences, before you can finally determine what promotes a healthy present and future and what does not. Slowly, through this process, you will begin to recognize what aspects of your current life are taking you to your desired destination and which are taking you away from it.

Performing accountability work can be intensely lonely. When I was neck deep in it, I hid every book that I was reading about boundaries from even my closest friends. The multitude of covers depicting nice white women wearing sweaters felt shameful to me, like there was something wrong with my character because everyone else presumably already knew this stuff. I watched as seemingly everyone I knew posted only pictures of their beautiful, smiling families and

their dream vacations and the extravagant meals they ate together. But as I talked to people in private, I found that everyone had similar problems with their own relationships, they just might be better at hiding it than me. And study after study shows that selfies are basically a modern version of christmas cards. Staged photos and letters that make everything look great from the outside when the inside is deeply precarious. Similarly, people don't go online to argue with strangers because they love their life. When we do these things, we are trying to fill a cup from the top while the bottom is still leaking.

To mend these things, you must stare deep into your own soul, understand your motivations, and make change in yourself because it's ***your*** own priority. So many people go to therapy, thinking of it as penance or punishment or because a loved one told them that it was a good idea. Therapy, like anything, only helps you if you are willing to see the problem and are ready to make a change in yourself.

Accountability works in the same way. It is about understanding that we make our own choices, create our own lives, and recognize the consequences of our actions. Rather than being jealous of what others have, we can create what we want, mentally and emotionally. Given all that I have been through, this is the published work that my teenage self would be most proud of. Because we don't know anyone who doesn't struggle with this shit.

We'll start by dispelling some popular misconceptions about accountability, getting familiar with some common brain science problems, explaining thinking traps, understanding inherited or developed habits, and how to reverse ways that your brain is working against you, as well as creating healthy ways to make decisions. Then we'll get into figuring out what maladaptive habits you have, where they come from, and how to fix them. Now let's do this!

WHAT ACCOUNTABILITY IS NOT

Faith got a call from someone wanting to start therapy with the preface *"I really need to do this because I'm a piece of shit."* Faith pointed out to him that people who are actually pieces of shit are generally just out there doing their thing, pillaging the economy and planet while profiting off slave labor, not looking to evaluate their own behavior under a microscope and change it. He begged to differ; he was totally sure he was a failure as a human being.

They worked together for a short time, and knowing when he was ready to graduate from therapy was easy. . . he understood how events in his life contributed to him going sideways and he had committed to not letting his history impact his present and future. He also, with much ado and self-compassion work, admitted that maybe (just maybe) he wasn't a piece of shit. He was a struggling human who was owning his mistakes and committing to accountability and a hopeful future.

All this is to say. . . accountability is not self-hatred, self-blame, self-recrimination, or self-flagellation. It doesn't work that way, unless you really are one of the few literal billionaire "captains of industry" mentioned above, in which case go fuck yourself in the ear.

Buddhist theologians distinguish thusly between regret and shame. Regret is the ability to look at decisions and learn how not to repeat negative outcomes. Shame, on the other hand, internalizes behavior that we don't approve of and compels us to accept abhorrent behavior as part of our core personality; to accept our worst behavior as *who we are*. Brain science bears out this belief. Shame makes both a person's thinking and behavior inflexible as they believe that their

behavior defines their character. We have this idea that in order to be better people, we have to be really hard on ourselves. We can't let ourselves off the hook right?

The problem with that gameplan (besides the fact that it's *really* shitty and mean) is that it doesn't *work*. Hard-assery doesn't work on ourselves or others, at least for long. It's exhausting, it's punitive, it's impossible to perfect so we end up backsliding into the crappy behavior that got us there.

So please don't think of this process as an ass-whoopin. Neither one of us have ever made any progress that way, and wouldn't impose that on anyone else. If anything, we are the anti-whoopin' patrol. Accountability work is far deeper than that, which is difficult, but also it is far more compassionate which makes it sustainable.

So let's start off with your current self-hatred messages and reframe them with compassionate accountability. It's ok if it doesn't feel authentic yet. We're gonna believe you aren't a piece of shit until you agree with us. On a piece of paper, make two columns. Label one "self-hatred" and one "compassionate accountability." And for each one reframe the negative messages playing on repeat in your head. The first column might say "I'm just a toxic and useless person," and the second column could be "I'm working to become more conscious of my patterns so I can better live up to my expectations for myself." With time and conscious thought, you will begin to erode years of shame and understand the person that you want to be.

Accountability Vs Punishment

Attempts to hold other people accountable, or, as Faith, being from the South, calls them, "come to Jesus meetings," almost always end in disaster. Over the past 50 years a social movement has formed for leftist

groups to come together to hold non-conforming group members accountable for past behavior. This isn't a bad idea. . . in theory. But in reality, the results are starkly unsuccessful because accountability comes from within. Punishment is not accountability.

In October 2017, it became public that Harvey Weinstein, co-founder of Miramax Films and co-chairman of The Weinstein Company, had spent decades exploiting a power imbalance to attack and/or leverage sexual favors out of nearly 100 women and then paid out large settlements to silence them. Which, let's be honest, is a long-winded way of saying "sexually assaulting and raping women."

As the public became increasingly furious at his exploitative behavior, his board fired him from his production company, his wife left him, he was suspended from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, and he was expelled from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. In February 2020, he was convicted on multiple accounts of felony sex crime and rape and will spend the next 23 years in prison. The only part of this story that is unique or novel, is the fact that some level of institutional justice has finally been served. Powerful people assaulting and exploiting others has been an open secret for many years. In the month after accusations first publicly emerged about Weinstein, more than thirty other high-profile men working in the entertainment industry and holding public offices were similarly exposed and shunned by large parts of their respective communities. Previously, incidents like this were excused, ignored, and dismissed. Now, it seems that there are finally some consequences to exploiting power. The script is changing.

Publicly showing that there are consequences for harmful behavior is a positive step. It empowers others to speak up and know that they will not be ostracized for acting as whistleblowers. Ronan Farrow's experiences in breaking the Harvey Weinstein story, as recounted in his book *Catch and Kill,* is a good example of this process in

action. Initially silenced by NBC, Farrow's reporting was published by the *New Yorker*. The story about Weinstein lent weight to the #MeToo movement, where thousands of survivors were emboldened to speak up about abuse they had faced from other powerful people. *Catch and Kill* allowed these narratives to be listened to instead of dismissed, justified, or ignored. And, in the case of Weinstein, they led to real social and legal consequences.

But as important as that process can be, it isn't accountability. Nor is it justice. It's *punishment*. Society has an awkward and confused relationship with punishment and that creates substantial barriers in achieving healing, closure, and, most importantly, accountability.

Punishment can create safety for vulnerable parties, or at least a recognition of harm caused. Punishment is about the use of social structures in order to maintain social order. Punishment can bring about relief. And maybe even add to the healing process. But it isn't enough. It does not create closure or resolution or understanding. And in some instances it becomes intensely problematic.

Every year Microcosm receives at least a few messages like this: "So-and-so is a rapist. Stop supporting them." And yet we've *never* received any messages that indicated "So-and-so's situation has been resolved. Please resume supporting their work." One party was deemed the perpetrator, others were termed survivors, and everyone else was told to pick sides. The perpetrator is quickly assumed to be a sociopathic villain and if you begin to fact check rumors or question the narrative, you are made out to be an apologist or at least complicit. Rather than opening a dialogue, an absolute judgement has been passed.

We have watched these methods crash and burn time and time again. It feels like our culture is more concerned about venting our emotions and imposing punitive measures than protecting people

or creating behavioral accountability. As I noticed these same flawed patterns endlessly repeating, I began researching the origin of these behaviors.

This brand of leftist shaming goes back to 1968 when Gene Sharp's popular *198 Methods of Nonviolent Action* suggested "Ostracism of persons" as an effective way of treating people he didn't agree with in his community. Jane Fonda imported this behavior into cooperative houses in Berkeley, CA and began performing Struggle Sessions, a tactic of the Communist Party in China to humiliate and persecute political and class rivals. A victim would be verbally and physically abused until they admitted to various crimes in front of a crowd. While this method became a way for 1960s women residents to confront patriarchal behavior in their homes, the consequences were not constructive; it was responding to psychological violence with more psychological violence and shame.

In *Ostracism: The Power of Silence*, Kipling Williams argues that shunning someone is more damaging to the accuser than to the accused. Numerous other books, including *Radical Acceptance* and *Conflict is not Abuse* argue this point as well. Essentially the argument is that by delegating resolution to someone that they cannot control, they are powerless to resolve their own pain and create needed closure to resolve the situation. I am divided about this. When people told me to make peace with the way that I was being beaten throughout my childhood, that seemed impossibly large and felt unfair that I, the victim, would be responsible for doing that. Shouldn't someone do that *for me*? But strategically, healing from a traumatic event should prioritize giving power back to yourself. When I figured out how to put those pieces together in my brain, I even got my mom to apologize for beating me—albeit 35 years later. Was it fair? No. But it was much more important to get that influence out of my daily life. This is one reason why it's vital

to walk the (ever-shifting) line of supporting victims without enacting exactly the kind of abusive behavior that you're standing against.

Similarly, it's vital to talk about problems in our communities. Leading researchers Erica Chenowith and Maria Stephan, whose work focuses on civil unrest, found that it takes about 3.5% of a population becoming actively engaged and participatory to engender change. Systemic change does require the majority of society or the government to be involved. Everything from Vietnam War Resistance to the Civil Rights Movement were started by less than 3.5% of the population before gaining traction and becoming the cultural norm.

But Chenowith and Stephan also found that certain tactics are more likely to engender lasting change than others. While much of the media focus was on their conclusion that non-violent change is twice as effective as violent insurrection, being nice wasn't the meta-message *we* took away. Far more interesting to us, was their finding that non-violent tactics a*lso required creativity, finesse, and strategic planning.* Back to the 60s and 70s for an example: While communal housing was instituting struggle sessions to call out patriarchal behavior, elsewhere in the country, feminists were looking at mechanisms of creating systemic change, opening homes for battered women and their children while advocating for laws to better protect those who were harmed. Half a century later, look at which strategies have made a lasting impact on the architecture of civilization.

More recently, another creative agent-of-change example created media attention when members of professional athletics teams refused to play games in cities where incidents of unchecked police violence had recently transpired. It's publically splashy (because sportsball!) and it demonstrates a community of care; none of the athletes protesting were directly involved in the incident but they took it upon themselves to engage. It's doubly effective because it hits right

in the pocketbook (people who own the teams and the stadiums are now gonna make diddly-squat).

Group involvement in system-wide change can be achieved, but it requires a tactical level of planning. And this means more than a Twitter-hashtagged verbal vomit fest that may make an asshole celebrity cave up for a few months, only to move on with their career like nothing happened. It means holding space for true accountability and working to facilitate growth and change in the behaviour of the perpetrator. It means cultivating personal development rather than sweeping cancelation.

So it is our hope that those of us doing this work are the 3.5% of the population who will change perception around this issue and shift the conversation about accountability from one of punishment and ostracism to an understanding that accountability is personal and that everyone makes mistakes from which they can learn and grow.

Lucas' Story

While working on this edition, we were contacted by Lucas Alan Dietsche, who had read a previous edition of this book and was looking for guidance. In 2006, Dietsche was 24 years old and was desperately trying to recreate the healthy relationship modeled by his parents. Lucas is autistic and had never been sexually active because he couldn't seem to meet women interested in him. He tried meeting women online and was very excited when he met Sara, who seemed to like him. Lucas reports offering to meet her for coffee, but states that she asked him to come to her house while her parents were away for the weekend instead. When Lucas arrived, a police officer arrested him as part of a sting operation. He was charged with using a computer to facilitate a sex crime. "Sara" was a police officer impersonating a minor.

Dietsche spent nine years in treatment at various institutions and was then put on probation. During the past two decades Lucas was diagnosed with psychotypal personality disorder, generalized anxiety, and chronic depressive disorder, which resulted in him dropping out of college and moving back in with his parents. He will be listed on the sex offender registry for the next decade.

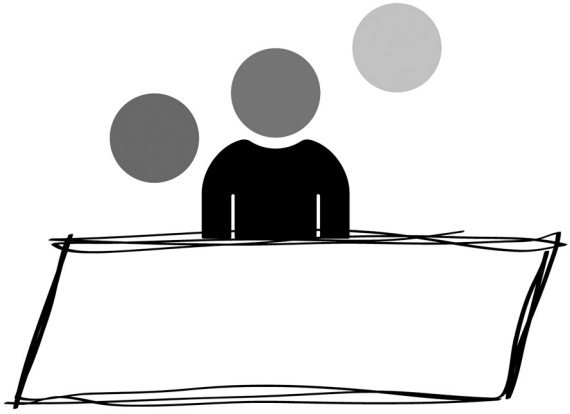
Part of his own self-accountability work became a commitment to radical organizing, but he quickly found that his criminal record made him unwelcome even among groups committed to prison abolition. The implications of his crimes were head spinning, even for people dedicated to rebuilding the criminal justice system. He was termed a rapist and pedofile. Hundreds of public statements were made about him and he was doxxed in the process. Despite these experiences, Lucas reports an understanding of why his presence could harm a movement, sharing *"I have been self-centered, selfish, arrogant, immature, dismissive, have at times acted inappropriately, without thought of how my background would affect marginalized communities. I thought that the more social activism I took part in, the less my background would matter. This, I have learned, was horrendously wrong and damaging to the groups I worked with."*

When Lucas asked me, *"Can a registered sex offender that was kicked out of many feminist, socialist, and anarchist groups over the past four years, work towards feminist and transformative justice work in their community? Or is this not possible?"* my heart broke a little. Does he need more accountability? Does the continued punishment and ostracism help him in his quest for accountability?

Is there room for people like Lucas in prison justice social movements? He continues to hope so, feeling that part of his accountability work is action toward community change. He relayed *"Going forward, I will continue to internalize, defragment, heal, and focus on learning and correcting my behavior and interaction skills. I will continue to*

better myself regarding boundaries, trauma, and person-centered language. I hope to participate in restorative, transformative, and healing justice." Lucas agreed to let us share his story, with his full name, knowing that people would look up his public record and make judgements about him—perhaps even in a public manner again. He isn't hiding from his past, he is hoping to use it to transform his community in the future.

Neither of us know Lucas, or know what his presence was like at these events. We aren't commenting on whether or not we think he should be included in social change communities. We are sharing it because it really made us think, and think hard, about punishment, accountability, and the possibilities for healing. If we are committed to being part of the 3.5%, what does that look like in our daily lives? There are many, many people like Lucas with complicated stories and situations hoping to reconnect. When someone like Lucas shows up at one of our groups do we say *"No, you're not welcome here"* or do we say *"Let's talk about that. . . what are your hopes regarding being here?"*



WHAT CAUSES UNWANTED BEHAVIOR?

Have you ever noticed that it's easy to generalize or stigmatize someone for a single action while we can justify doing the exact same thing? If someone else runs a stop sign, they are a "bad driver." If we do the same thing, we are "in a hurry to do an important favor for a sick friend."

The reality is that our behavior can be better mapped out by looking at our reasons for our actions. If we take a shower in the morning, we tell ourselves it's because we need to be clean and presentable to face the world. More likely, it's because our brain is wired for routine. Our shower programs our brain to start waking up, getting hungry, and thinking about our day. Though, in the bigger picture, our habits and behaviors generally start in childhood.

You may have heard the troubling and defeatist phrase "an abused child becomes a childish abusive adult" or "hurt people hurt people." However, these ideologies, like most ideologies, only represent part of the reality of an abusive childhood.

First, abused children develop maladaptive coping mechanisms to attempt to get their needs met. A hungry child might steal from the corner store if their parents don't provide for them.[1] They understand that they are harming others but they need to eat. They may also have siblings that need to eat. They recognize that telling other adults about their household will get people "in trouble," so they resolve the issue and protect the only family system they know. As they age into adulthood, those habits may remain even after they are unnecessary.

1 Oppositional defiant disorder is correlated most strongly with poverty than any other identifier about a child.

Second, a traumatized person feels shame in their trauma. The shame tells them that the trauma is their fault. Shame tells us we *are* a mistake, not a person who *made* mistakes. If you stole to feed your family, you didn't "do what was necessary out of desperation," you are a *thief,* presumably because you have no morals, values, ethics, or concern for others. Trauma often plays out in the person not feeling taken seriously and going to extreme lengths to make their case, often by exaggerating. We replay and echo these voices in our own heads, even if no one has ever explicitly said these things to us. We know the worst light in which our actions can be cast and we are often quite ready to see ourselves in this unflattering way.

If we have the perception that we never exercise, it reduces our motivation for following through in the present and future. When we crave chocolate, we don't necessarily contemplate if it's healthy, when we had it last, or why we want it so badly. We justify our need for it and why we deserve it. Conversely, if every attempt to talk about our feelings with our parents was met with annoyance and dismissal, we won't talk to our loved ones about how we feel, even if they desperately want to hear it.

In psychology, these prior experiences (priors), values, and attitudes shape and sometimes distort our present reasoning. This is termed the **belief-bias effect**, and it frames our lived experiences and strengthens our subconscious decision-making considerations. They can also lead us to some spectacular leaps in logic.

In 2016, some fringe conspiracy theorists were convinced that leaked emails from a high-ranking political official demonstrated "proof" that "cheese pizza" was coded language for "child pornography." In December that year, a man drove from North Carolina to Washington, DC with an assault rifle to rescue non-existent sex slaves from the non-existent basement of a very real restaurant, leading to the tragic climax

of "Pizzagate." The various responses to the situation quickly spun out of control as actual survivors of sex slavery were understandably upset and held up the Pizzagate conspiracy as an example of no one taking sexual abuse seriously. Based on their priors of not having their own childhood sex abuse taken seriously, the fact that Pizzagate was dismissed as the hoax that it was felt like yet another miscarriage of justice and dismissal of other very real abuses. And the saddest part of it all is the fact Pizzagate only made the conspiracy theorists desperate mantra all the more frustrating for everyone involved. Even after the shooter saw that there were no children, he still believed in the totality of those claims.

When we face a difficult decision, we have three sets of guiding principles: **personal values** that are unique to ourselves; **institutional values** that are supplied by schools, governments, or employers; and **group values** that we inherit from people or a community that we identify with. Most people have values like honesty, compassion, bravery, or respect for the agency of others. Similarly, **societal values** are things like the age of consent, submitting accurate paperwork at your school or job, and respecting your neighbors by not owning too many chickens.

Taken together, these values form our individual culture that creates our individual meaning and purpose, group affiliations, and what we prioritize. For most of us, our value system starts with our family of origin and then goes on to be further influenced by friends, mentors, and other social circles. Of course, in practice, values become very hypothetical and informed by the groups that we are a part of. If your parents are staunch Republicans, even if they value staying healthy and working out, they may routinely make sniping remarks about your interest in yoga, perhaps associating it with the hippie ideals of their generation instead of with your health. It's not because there is

anything wrong with yoga, but because they are having trouble seeing how it connects to their values. Or they are simply not respecting your choice to do what's right for you.

Why do people that love us treat us this way? Most of the time, they don't understand our perspective and are discomforted that our perspectives are so different. Cultural inclusion is predicated on a mutually shared set of values. As the Venn diagram overlap gets smaller (meaning there is less and less we agree on), some individuals (your yoga-hating parents in this case) feel alienated and lack the realization, language, or skills to find common ground.

Similarly, if you met all of your friends at yoga class and self-care is a shared group value, even if they care about you, they may still be dismissive about your pursuit of climbing the ladder at a Fortune 500 company. Perhaps they are true punks who consider financial success poisonous. Or perhaps they have more inherited family wealth than you and don't understand your concerns about money because it isn't something they have to think about. A group of friends that holds honesty as a moral may also believe that giving a friend brutally honest feedback is reprehensible behavior.

This doesn't make any of these choices *incorrect*. It does, however, offer a good indication of how your friends might handle these situations in the future. Everyone has their own values. But it can be difficult to separate our own from those of the groups that we are a part of. Morals like this have a way of infiltrating our brains when we are just small children. Not because we are weak and unformed, but because human beings learn through imitation. Quite literally, each of us learned to speak by imitating the sounds made by those around us. So of course the creation of our early values stems from the same processes. And as we grow up, it can be very difficult to distinguish our own values from those of our parents.

If you were raised by parents with wealth, they may have less sympathy for tenants organizing a rent strike against their landlord. They may be more likely to view the morality of the situation as "tenants should pay their rent and if they can't afford it, that's because they are irresponsible." They may argue that the most important factor in the situation is that tenants are accountable to their rental commitments.

However, if your parents slogged through a lifetime of generational poverty, they might see the situation as a community organizing together in order to balance a power dynamic with their landlord. They might point out that the tenants are living paycheck to paycheck, prone to external factors outside of their control while the landlord is building equity from the money of the poor. They may argue it's the landlord who should be accountable for their inherent privilege and ability to help others.

If you are a goth that prioritizes self-expression but your favorite musician is Elton John, your friends may tease you about it. You may say that "Rocket Man" is only your ringtone ironically. You may start to hide the records and take down the posters. Your interest in Elton John may become closeted and something you are ashamed of. You might even start to question it yourself.

Imagine how this could affect deeper aspects of your identity that you can't change. If you are queer and your parents never accepted this, it will likely drive a wedge between you until you are so far apart that they either learn to accept you, dismiss this aspect of your identity, or ostracize you completely. Further, other people's values may make you hate aspects of yourself well into adulthood and affect how you trust and treat other people.

Similarly, institutional ethics complicate our expressions of our own values. People frequently confuse the law with "right" and

"wrong," but is the morality around age of consent different between Oregon and Washington?[2] Of course not. Sex with a 16-year-old may be legal in Washington but if you're 45 it's still gross and that's not aspiring to core values of personhood. And it's gross.

Your own values must be your guiding principle when deciding what is right for you. On occasion, institutional values can actually make society *less* safe. If you decide to paint a crosswalk on a public street DIY style, you will statistically save lives but doing so is against the law—no matter where you live! Bigger example? Hitler did not break the law. Germany's "enabling act" allowed him the right to enact and enforce any laws he saw fit without parliamentary oversight.

Conversely, a Christian who believes in following the law might have trouble rectifying the mythology that Jesus was, indeed, a criminal. In defiance of Roman law, he worked on Sundays, flipped over tables and threatened to destroy a Jewish Temple when he found people gambling in it. Worst of all, he claimed to be a King—which is treason. Of course, history is written by the victors and Christians decided that Jesus' illegal actions were just. Thus the governing laws were in the wrong. Similarly today, most people would agree that Spartacus' leading an army of 100,000 freed slaves in revolt was righteous and that, while it was the law, Rome was wrong to hire a wealthy mercenary to murder them all. Over the past 60 years, civil rights activists broke the law right and left. . . and most of us agree that those were unjust laws that needed breaking.

It's easy to judge wrongs in the distant past but considering contemporary examples opens the black hole of which current laws are in opposition to our morals and values. You can find scores of laws that make no sense: a drunk person cannot legally remain inside a bar in Alaska but isn't that a safer place to sober up than leaving? Couples who

2 In Washington State, people can consent to sexual activity with adults at 16 years old. In Oregon you must be 18 to lawfully consent.

are not married cannot have sex in Virginia but not all couples intend to get married; indeed, younger generations are moving away from the institution. Gay men who *are* married in Arizona cannot legally have sex. Atheists cannot run for public office in Texas. In Oregon, if you have a container of urine in your car, it must remain in your vehicle until you get home. There are reasons that these all became laws but they don't necessarily create a safer or more just world.

When I was in my 20s, I met all of my friends from playing board games and making weird art films. So my friends found it strange that I owned a business and worked all the time. Despite the fact that I lived below the poverty line, the perception was that I was better off than they were. While I was in charge of my own destiny—at least to a certain extent—it was clear to me that the floor could fall out at any moment. As we got older, these same friends got professional jobs and now earn twice what I do. The tables have turned and they now express frequent concern about my unstable financial future and how I am ever going to afford to retire (part of the answer is that I am doing what I want to do with my life already. . . I don't need to retire to do it). While their experiences and values have shifted, they continue to care about me but it is the expression of that care that has changed along with their perspectives.

When I was a teenager, my best friend brought over a new CD. Music was the entire basis of our friendship. Within a few minutes, he dropped it on the floor and broke the case. When I returned from the next room, I noticed that he had put one of my CDs in the broken case and taken one of my unbroken cases. The problem wasn't the broken case, so much as the values, morals, priors, and ethics that led him to that decision. This moment could have been a lesson in how he viewed our friendship in relation to his possessions, but it took me a while longer to recognize the paradigm at play.

At that moment, I simply switched the cases back but didn't register any lessons about his character from this moment, which should have informed how much I trusted him. Over the next year, he had sex with two different people I was dating and pressured a third to leave me for him. If I had possessed the emotional intelligence to recognize the early warning signs, I could have distanced our relationship and prevented a lot of pain. Or I could have set better boundaries early on, rather than giving implicit permission to be treated as an extension of his property.

Just because a choice has worked well for us in our lives, it's not necessarily the best thing for even our closest friends. I ride my bike to work at 5 AM every day and that routine has kept me fit and happy into middle age. Every day I watch the sunrise. While studies have thoroughly shown that commuting by car has been correlated with many negative life outcomes (including a higher divorce rate), that doesn't mean that I'm making the correct choice and anyone in their car is making the incorrect choice. Though I can say with certainty, that I am making the correct choice for *myself.*

Most people would be miserable with this routine. Faith, for example, doesn't live in a bikeable city so it's not an option. And she has learned to use her car time to drink coffee, catch up on phone calls (hands-free!), and listen to audio of whatever online course she is taking at the moment. She's made her car time an effective part of her day she actually enjoys (relatively speaking) and her marriage is fine.

Thus we can't judge the actions of others for doing something differently than we do. When I talk about these choices with my friends, I can hear the fear of judgment in their voices so I assure them that it's awesome that they are making the right choice for them. As long as they aren't telling me what to do, it doesn't violate my values or harm me in any way for them to have long, daily car commutes if that's what

works best for them. I do worry about the statistical likelihood of their breakups though. Except Faith's marriage, obviously.

It is easy to misconstrue the actions of others to seemingly feel like they relate to our values. A neighbor once explained that she ended a friendship because a friend didn't spend enough money on their own wedding. My neighbor interpreted this to mean that the marriage wasn't that important to her friend, and marriage was a strong value for herself. Money wasn't a concern for my neighbor, which led her to fail to consider that it might be the *primary* concern for her friend. She had presumed (rather weirdly) that her friend's action was showing conflict with her values, when there are many other explanations about not spending a lot on a wedding.

The most important thing to remember when deciding how to act is that we can only make decisions for ourselves and for people dependent on us, like our children or a parent with Alzheimer's. We may not like the decisions that our spouse makes at times, but that doesn't give us the right to manipulate them. Our locus of control and agency is a matter of figuring out who to trust and including and excluding various people from our lives. Similarly, it's important to ensure that our actions are holding up our values in how we treat our neighbors and other people in our communities. Sometimes this is more complicated than others.

My hobby is collecting scrap pieces of wood and building shelves and carts out of them. This creates a large amount of dust and other detritus. One of the business owners next door to my house offered use of their dumpster, as long as there was room. So each week I put scraps that fit into the dumpster an hour before it is emptied, to make sure that my actions aren't imposing on anyone else's use.

One day I tossed some scraps a few minutes before leaving for work. When I came home that day, I found wood scraps tossed over my fence. It seemed that perhaps someone had seen me dump them and returned them unceremoniously into my yard, perhaps assuming that I didn't have permission. It's not an ideal situation. I discussed with my partner if I should try to talk to the other tenants or owners, but she pointed out that we don't know the causation or what someone else is thinking. We don't even know *who* did it. We shouldn't respond in any way until there is a clearer communication, lest we escalate this into a conflict. So the following week I put the boards back in the dumpster. No one has ever complained and I'm glad that I didn't escalate tension with my neighbors.

You can't know what someone else is thinking or feeling unless you have a conversation with them about it. And sometimes, frankly, that isn't an option that's available to you. There are often literally millions of possible explanations for why someone did something. . . so taking ten steps back and not jumping to conclusions greatly increases our odds at resolving disagreements when they happen.

Why Is Accountability So Difficult?

Remember earlier when we said accountability really only means ownership of our own behaviors? Doesn't that seem like a "well, duh" statement? If it was as easy in practice as it is in theory, there would be no need for this book. In reality, our wonky brains (whose primary function is to keep us alive and in homeostasis) do all these weird adaptations and work-arounds and reactionary patterns that make living in alignment with our morals difficult and make accepting responsibility for when we fall out of alignment even more difficult.

When we recognize ourselves as out of alignment, and choose to do the difficult work of accountability, we must first get to a deeper

understanding of how we fell out of alignment to begin with. Why do we have behavioral grooves that don't align with our values, goals, or sometimes even with our own best interests? It's typically because of some combination of trauma reactions, heuristics and biases, thinking errors, and relationship paradigms. To understand how this works, we need to understand how our brains work, both alone and in groups. Accountability involves not just saying sorry for past actions but understanding how cognitive shortcuts create problematic patterns of behavior, and by recognizing this we can avoid repeating them in the present.

Heuristics and Biases

The brain uses shortcuts (psychologists call them ***heuristics***) to problem solve and make decisions quickly and without expending significant effort. The common decision making heuristics include:

- **The Affect Heuristic:** The affect heuristic occurs when our current emotions or overall mood influences our decision making. If someone asks Faith for a favor when she's hangry, she is far more likely to feel offended and consider the request unreasonable than when she is satiated.
- **The Availability Heuristic**: The availability heuristic occurs when we rely on the information we can most readily bring to mind. When Faith's car was broken into a few years ago and her gorgeous, vintage purple suede coach bag was stolen (yes, she is *still* very upset by this) it was in a neighborhood she doesn't visit often. When in that neighborhood months later to go to her husband's favorite bakery, her availability heuristic pulled up and told her it wasn't safe to park there (even though it was just as safe

as most other neighborhoods in her town. . . and, indeed, her car had also been broken into right in front of her own house. . .).

- **The Representativeness Heuristic:** The representativeness heuristic occurs when we compare the current situation to a representative model in our brain, basically our prototype. Your prototype of a therapist may be the nice middle-aged lady in a twinset. Or it may be the therapist from the *Sopranos*. So you may be confused by Faith, who fits the middle-aged requirement but is a cranky, foul-mouthed, tattooed therapist who wears band t-shirts to work and visitors presume she's another client walking through the waiting room, not the person they are waiting to see.

These shortcuts save us mental energy and let us make quick decisions that are, more often than not, helpful (red stove heuristic means that it's hot so don't touch. . . or. . . man running toward me with a knife is probably stabby, pivot away). *But* these heuristics can also lead to **biases** in our thinking because of the innate failures that will occur within a process that doesn't leave room for complexity. We can become stuck in patterns of stereotyping and prejudicial thinking. We can fail to take in additional information, recognize situational context, or think beyond that well-tread neural pathway.

If you do a google search, you can find as many different lists of cognitive biases as there are types of tacos, so for the sake of our work here we're going to stick with the ten common ones that are most supported by the original research conducted by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in 1972 on heuristics and biases.

- **Actor-Observer Bias:** Our likelihood of attributing our own behavior to external causes, while attributing other

people's behavior to internal causes. For example, if I cut someone off in traffic it was because I couldn't see them in my blind spot, but if someone cuts me off it's because they're a dickhead.

- **Anchoring Bias:** Our likelihood of relying too heavily on the first piece of information we learn. Faith was horrified to find out how much a car battery cost a few years ago, presuming it would be close to the $60 she paid for one the first time in 1996. In the same way, racist, phobic, and ableist trash ideas fed to someone as a child can become an anchoring bias they carry into adulthood.
- **Attentional Bias:** Our inclination to include certain information while ignoring other information. The number of people who have been fooled by "cauliflower pizza crust" because they didn't notice that the crust was mostly rice flour and therefore just as carb heavy as something from Dominoes is not a small number.
- **Availability Bias:** The availability bias is a direct function of the availability heuristic mentioned above, it refers to our likelihood of believing something just because the idea is readily available. Just like Faith's most recent car break-in was easier to refer back to than the one that happened in front of her house many years ago, it was easier for her to worry more about Guadalupe street than her own subdivision.
- **Confirmation Bias:** When we seek out data that supports what we already believe and discount the information that challenges it. When you are researching a topic, you are more likely to believe the article that most closely aligns

with your already held views. If you think Politician X is a liar, you're going to presume things they say are falsehoods and disregard anything that demonstrates the veracity of their statements. (And a not-so-slight aside? Our social media feeds have algorithms that directly play into these confirmation biases which makes them even stronger and more difficult to uproot).

- **Dunning-Kruger Effect Bias:** The bias we have at thinking we are better at something than we actually are. Interestingly, this seems tied to whether or not we rehearse something in our minds. This applies to everything from logical reasoning to assuming that a professional job would be easy for us. Without experience and competence from doing something, we can't recognize our own lack of skill. It makes us think we can do it in real life since we "storied" it. It's not just pure ego, it's a definite brain quirk.
- **False Consensus Bias:** What happens when we tend to overestimate the number of people who agree with you. Faith experiences this every damn time there is a local election. She is always heartwarmed to find that Facebook is filled with passionate and politically involved friends who vote, so she anticipates high numbers of participation. Then, invariably, she sees that, once again, voter turnout continues to be abysmal and that she is bumping into this bias.
- **Functional Fixedness Bias:** This is when we see things as working only in a particular way. Humans do this far more often than other animals who use tools, probably because we create stories (heuristics) about what that tool is *meant* to do, so we miss out on all the other things that

it *can* do. Faith leaves a cast iron comal on her stove at all time (because she lives in San Antonio and tortillas are life), but recently found herself pulling out a frying pan to grill a little spaghetti squash rather than just toss it on the comal that was already available. I would like to point out (brag) that autistic people suffer from this much less, on the whole, and tend to implement tools in ways that the designers never foresaw.

- **Halo Effect Bias:** When our overall impression of a person affects what we think about their character or abilities. This is why we are more likely to believe the best of someone we find attractive and why people we find attractive tend to make more money than those of us who are squishy and average looking.
- **Misinformation Effect Bias:** This refers to the brain's tendency to confabulate and misremember details, and even believe we had the direct experience of something because we heard someone else did. This is why eyewitness testimony is actually fairly unreliable.
- **Optimism Bias:** We tend to expect that we are less likely to experience misfortune than someone else. Which is why so many people will continue bad health habits even as they see those around them fall sick.
- **Self-Serving Bias:** This is an internal versus external locus of control error again, much like the Actor-Observer Bias. In this case, it's about the outcome. We are much more likely to see good fortune as something we earned while thinking others lucked into it.

Good news? Just being aware of our biases makes us almost 30% less likely to react to them. Additional bias management tools (including attending to multiple factors and challenging our internal thought patterns) are something we are going to delve into more deeply later in this book. There is even a whole therapeutic modality, known as cognitive bias modification therapy, that has tricks and tips we can all use in our day to day lives to avoid these little logical pitfalls.

Subconsciously each of us have a set of experiences that form a set of beliefs about people who belong to other groups. I can't count how many times I've heard the adage that "All homeless people are too lazy to work." I am constantly asked why "bicyclists *always* break the law." A book by a white woman that I read once used the line "It was a typical Mexican family" without any further information. What image is she trying to invoke? I got in touch to ask and rather defensively, she replied "I think you know what I'm talking about." I believe that she meant that they were poor. I had pictured a celebratory atmosphere with an outdoor culture, music, and fresh tortillas. I liked my vision better.

It can be very difficult to even try to understand people who are not like us. Just because someone doesn't prioritize recycling, it doesn't mean they are a "bad person." Even if someone rejects the concept of recycling, the environment might still be a primary value for them. Perhaps they are more concerned with the energy expended melting down and reforming certain objects during the recycling process. If you want to change people's behavior, put a cork in the impulse to judge them based on your own biases. Start by *understanding their behavior*. You may find that you don't have as many answers as you once believed.

Classic CBT Coming in Hot And Spicy

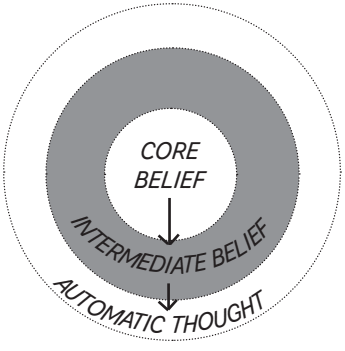
Faith used to teach cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) for community mental health organizations so she is having flashbacks right now, but it's important to discuss our belief systems and how they impact our unwanted behaviors. Aaron Beck, the founder of CBT, mapped out the process of how our belief systems are formed and maintained. It is:

1) Automatic Thoughts—The constant stream of chatter that our brains maintain on an ongoing basis. Automatic is the operative word. It's just the dumb shit our brain says that may be completely off the beam, but can easily become reinforced and taken as fact by our brains if it pops up often enough.

2) Intermediate Beliefs—Our rules about the world. Our "if, thens. . ." that guide many of our actions.

3) Core Beliefs—The central truths that we develop about ourselves and the world that we hold to as fact, whether they are true or not. Core beliefs that are negative like "I am unlovable" become a foundation for continued mental health struggles.

Now of course all of these beliefs are impacted and reinforced by our life experiences, family systems, friend groups, traumatic events, etc. Our belief system structure doesn't exist in a vacuum but it is still a really important part in understanding how we act and react. Because quite often, these unwanted behavior patterns are based on the beliefs we hold, often without conscious realization.



Creating change starts with making these belief setting patterns more conscious so we can examine and challenge them.

So if that is the internal dialogue process, *how* exactly do these outside experiences impact and reinforce this process? Let's get heavy and go there.

Threat Assessments and Trauma Responses

Remember earlier when we said our brain's first and foremost job is to keep us alive? True story. So our brain is hardwired to protect us, *and* in order to do so it's going to err on the side of caution. *And* it's going to rely on our cognitive processes model and the shortcuts we have developed. Meaning it isn't always going to do a great job at assessing what is actually a threat and what isn't. And our brain's protective responses often end up doing the opposite—getting us into unhealthy patterns of behavior that hurt us and others.

Here's how the brain's threat assessment system works. The brain looks like a bunched up mass of overcooked pasta, right? The brainstem is the part where it starts to untangle itself from the rest of the noodles, straightens out, and transitions into your spinal cord. The brainstem is our fundamental survival tool. While cardiac muscles regulate basic needs like breathing in and out and the heart pumping, the brainstem controls the rate, speed, and intensity of these things. So it will ramp up for a panic attack, for example, as if to say *pay attention; we might be dying.*

Being alert, being conscious, and being aware of our surroundings are all brain stem tasks. When the brainstem is registering pain or panicking, it floods the prefrontal cortex (PFC) with a bunch of neurochemicals that change how the PFC operates. The PFC is the part of your brain in charge of **executive functioning**, like problem-solving,

goal-oriented behaviors, and managing social interactions according to "appropriate" expectations. When our brain stem senses danger, based on our priors, the behavioral actions of the PFC become *fight, flight,* or *freeze*.

- Fight interprets your best course of action as *beating their ass before your ass gets beat.*
- Flight determines *get the fuck out of here! This isn't safe!*
- Freeze means *if you don't respond at all, maybe they will go away.*

These are essential survival tasks when something dangerous is going on, such as when cavemen came face to face with a prehistoric housecat the size of a small sedan. The amygdala, the brain's fear processor, says "I remember the last time this happened, it really hurt, which was bad!" And the brainstem tells the prefrontal cortex *"Let's get out of here so we don't get hurt again!"* So we say "Peace out, threatening situation, gotta jet!" Or we fight back. Or we freeze up and play dead and hope the situation passes us over.

Being able to assess threat and respond appropriately is a necessary survival skill and isn't problematic in and of itself. But when our threat system is activated continuously or activated in very extreme circumstances, it can end up staying "turned on." A trauma is essentially anything that overwhelms our ability to cope, and if we don't achieve resolution and healing from traumatic events our brains continue to respond from this trauma-activated state. Which can lead to these survival responses being frequently misapplied to situations where we feel under attack but aren't facing any real threat. All kinds of things can feel threatening. . . like a final exam or a bullshit work deadline or wordlessly walking past a stranger on the street.

Our experiences determine our expectations for the future, and thus our reality. Our brains are fed a certain amount of raw data that is processed to determine conclusions about what is going on around us. They generalize and err on the side of safety. That raw data is not made available to our conscious selves—only the conclusions that our brain draws from it are. And these interpretations of that data inform our reality. If your worldview is interpreted through a lens of unhealed trauma, you are more likely to respond to the present as if you are reliving a past trauma.

For example, if you have been attacked by a stranger in a dark alley, you may believe that this is a common event. If your previous employer went out of business suddenly without warning, you'd be concerned that your present employer will too, despite no evidence of this happening. It is through these same devices that, if you were to see a black and white photo of a banana, your brain will interpret it to be yellow because of every banana that you've seen previously.

The brain already assumes more than we realize or would like to admit. . . remember all that stuff on heuristics and biases? It's important for us to recognize that we are unreliable narrators about the facts of our own realities. Our sensors become too subjectively attuned and you are more likely to remember the emotional experience of how something felt, rather than the material facts of what happened. Accepting this can be very difficult because your reality is so convincing. When others disagree, it can feel like they are trying to overwrite our emotional experiences with their own.

Perhaps the most famous example of this happened in 2015. Cecilia Bleasdale sent a photo of a dress she saw for sale in Chester, England to ask her daughter, Grace Johnston, if it was appropriate to wear to her wedding in Scotland. Grace and Cecilia argued about whether the dress was white with gold lace or blue with black lace.

Soon, the subject of the dress' color became one of the biggest viral arguments ever with 183 people tweeting about it *every second*. (And we aren't gonna say y'all need a hobby. . . because this is exactly the kind of shiny object brains get hooked into.)

Why were millions of people so interested in arguing about something that they had no personal stake in? Because everyone's brain besides Cecilia's was lying to them in a very convincing way.

About one out of every ten billion images weirds our brains out, and the dress picture was one of them. The photo was very overexposed, the lighting was ambiguous, and the dress was washed out; so much so that the three photoreceptors in most people's brain parse it a little bit differently, based on our own prior experiences. Since only Cecilia's prior experiences were consistent with the brain's color correcting, everyone else's brain lied to them about the *only* way to interpret the raw data.

The most prevalent theory is that color is determined by the kind of lighting, so people's brains interpret the dress' color based on how much sunlight they see on an average day. If people usually wake up early, they will see the dress as white with gold lace. If people stay up late and sleep in usually, they will see the dress as blue with black lace. Our brain assumes we are seeing the dress in a setting that we would commonly experience.

Similarly, if you have formative experiences at a young age, these can downright define how you see the world. I was physically abused from a young age so I expected that I would be treated this way for my entire life. Consequently, I put myself in situations where this could happen because it did not occur to me that I had other options. This is exactly how a tripped threat assessment system left unhealed turns into a trauma response.

Relational Influences

In 2010 Internet activist Eli Pariser coined the term *"filter bubble"* to describe the way that only selective information can penetrate our social groups. When we traffick the Internet, what is shown to us is based on our previous activities. Soon this creates a closed loop as only information reinforcing our views is introduced. Our ability to become more educated and informed is actively undermined by these engines telling us what they think we want to hear and preventing information that conflicts with our views from reaching us.

In 2016, as celebrity deaths were reported in real time on social media, viewers were devastated and many people were under the impression that 2016 marked the worst year yet for celebrity deaths. But our brains had tricked us. The sadness was real but it was just another cognitive distortion. It was another average year for celebrity deaths. Although Faith would like to point out that this was the year we lost Prince *and* Bowie *and* Carrie Fisher, so it did suck pretty hard.

It's notoriously difficult to study how people react and interact within groups, not to mention parse out the ways in which they move toward conformity or alignment. The term *groupthink* was invented by Irving Janis to explain a theory he had, based on case studies, about problematic decision making by the members of groups. . . the idea being that *under certain conditions* unanimity is far more likely to become the number one priority, more important than being effective or even moral.

Research conducted through the 70s and 80s on the theory is limited (because, as mentioned above, it's really hard to study effectively), which is why—to this day—groupthink remains a psychological theory, not a facty-fact. But some of the research that

was conducted determined (as mentioned above) that there are certain factors beyond group cohesiveness. Some of them include:

1) Directive leadership. Someone sets the tone of how things are going to be and tells others how to act rather than requesting and hearing feedback.

2) An environment that is challenging, typically because of external threats. Meaning the group is safe and everywhere else the floor is totally lava.

3) Lack of social diversity. Nuff said?

So if these pre-existing conditions exist, the more likely it is that this model predicts some shoddy thinking and decision-making. Groupthink makes us less likely to take into account our own moral compass and the larger issues at play. It also protects us from the distress of accountability because our poor decisions are reinforced as good or appropriate. . . or at least "just following orders."

The term *social contagion* is a good 200 years old. We're going to nerd out for a second because this is actually pretty important to accountability work so hang with us. The word stems from the latin word for *touch,* because the idea was that mere exposure "infected" people. Why 200 years ago? That's when Goethe published a book entitled *The Sorrows of Young Werther.* In the book, the aforementioned Young Werther committed suicide. During a wave of sucides in Europe, it was found that many of the individuals who died by suicide had been in contact with the book (and many of them utilized imitative means). In order to stop the spread, authorities in several regions banned the book. In the hundreds of years since (especially in the past 75, when research on social contagions began in earnest), researchers have confirmed that attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors can and do move through a society, like a highly infectious case of the chicken pox.

Here's the problem, though. Social contagion implies lack of control over our ability to think critically and hold our own moral center. If social contagion theory is true, then we are all just kinda fucked and accountability is a pointless exercise. Later social contagion researchers posited a couple of different explanations for our behavior-pox. One is *Emergent Norm Theory* and one is the evergreen *Social Learning Theory* (psych majors. . . did you know this was in response to social contagion theory?). Both of these theories posit that our normative behavior is conscious and deliberately imitative within communities, especially when other factors are demonstratively present. Groupthink again, y'all.

Growing up in punk rock communities, the prevailing value was that it was okay to shoplift from corporate grocery stores because it would be a tax write off for the stores anyway and we were hungry. This value would definitely be controversial to others, even those of similar political ideology. But in punk rock, you could be judged if you were uncomfortable shoplifting because it was deemed the "right" thing to do by the group.

Twenty years later it's important for me not to lean on the reflex of an action that is no longer necessary for survival, can harm people, and carries substantial risk. Like my neighbor judging her friend for things that impacted each person differently, in my discomfort around shoplifting, I was being judged for a decision that carried much greater risk for some people and should ultimately be based on individual prerogative and levels of comfort. Taken out of this context, the acceptability of shoplifting is absurd and it's weird to feel shame for *not* doing it. But I certainly internalized that shame. Why? All of the required ingredients for me to comply were present—social contagion, my traumatic upbringing, and fear of rejection from the group—so I did.

So the big takeaway here is that while we have a predisposition to follow relational influences, and in fact there are evolutionary benefits to doing so (safety in groups being the big one and ostracism crippling our self-image, secondarily), it's ultimately a choice we are making. We can learn skills to not acquiesce to these group norms when they don't serve either us or the greater good. As the wise philosopher Lindsey Buckingham once sang, it is entirely possible to go your own way.

Susceptibility to Propaganda

In the era of fake news, truthiness, and alternative facts it's important to recognize another groupthink variant, *susceptibility to propaganda*. And few people encapsulate as wide a variety of cognitive biases and distortions as Jordan Peterson does.

Jordan Peterson is a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. He also holds a bachelor's in political science from the University of Alberta and a PhD in clinical psychology from McGill, and he taught for years at Harvard. Largely unknown in popular culture until recently, he spent much of his career doing exciting things like conducting studies on the genetic predisposition for addictive behavior.

Then in 2016, Peterson exploded into consciousness when he began criticizing the roles of masculinity and political correctness via YouTube. For example, Peterson claims that our self-worth comes from the assumption of responsibility, which sounds profound, but what he is actually saying is that racism, sexism, classism, abeism, neurophobia, and transphobia are only a framework that goes away when we ignore them in favor of "individual responsibility." This argument requires privileged people to literally do nothing differently and tells the people without the power that it's all in our heads. A poster boy for the alt right, his hollow ideas come across as credible by mixing a stiff cocktail

of philosophy, Carl Jung, the Bible, Huxley, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, psychology, Orwell, and neuroscience. He talks about things like the tightrope walk between honor and happiness while ironically criticizing activists for "having nothing but ideology," as a mechanism for insisting that respect for minorities takes away *his* rights, and arguing with transgender people about how it oppresses *him* to use their correct pronouns.

Why is Jordan Peterson's ideology consumed by millions of people? By invoking the work of credible sources and a background from credible institutions, our brain can be tricked to think that Peterson is credible. In one interview, Peterson suggests that sexual harassment in the workplace continues because social rules around dating are unclear. This seems interesting but his first example is that women could be forbidden to wear makeup. And immediately he's just using logic to demand regression. Wouldn't it make more sense to establish social rules than to put more restrictions solely on women?

His methods are convincing because he is utilizing just about every trick to prevent our brains from thinking critically about what he's saying. He obtained an advanced degree from an enviable school and then went on to teach at a prestigious one so he must know what he's talking about, right? Just like a speaker being tall or confident, these attributes trick our brain into thinking someone is credible or even *smart*. By using big words drawn from a variety of sources that intellectual people consider timeless, he further cements his alleged authority.

While a relevant and timely example, Jordan Peterson is not the first, last, or onliest to employ propogantic strategies to encourage groupthink. He merely demonstrates a weakness in our critical thinking: we aren't great at putting on the brakes and asking ourselves

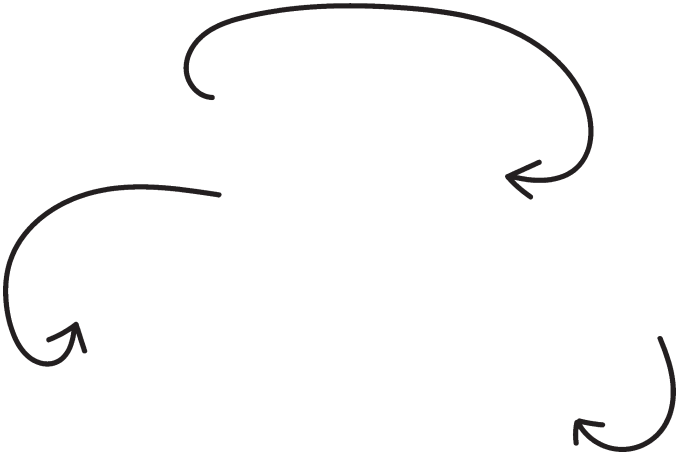
journalistic questions about the information in front of us. Who or what does this behavior serve? Who profits from it?

There are certain things that make us more susceptible to propaganda. One of the biggest indicators of our susceptibility is our regulation of our working memory. Those of us who juggle a lot of "mental clutter" (meaning we have multiple bits of information bouncing around at the same time) are more susceptible to thinking *everything* bouncing around up there is relevant and should be taken into account (Dr. Peterson! So tall! So many letters after his name!). Add to that the sheer repetitive nature of his (and others) narratives of truthiness and you have all the fixin's for a nice propaganda sandwich.

Notice that dumbacity isn't listed as one of the issues that increase susceptibility? We all know really smart people who believe dumb propogantic shit, and we have all *been* smart people who believed dumb propagandic shit. So understanding susceptibility is relevant. Research demonstrates that we can overcome propogantic thinking with a well-tuned internal fact checker, which we are going to explicate in more detail in the next section of this book.

In Conclusion. . .

No matter how smart we are, our brains can still be very, very dumb for a multitude of reasons. How we are wired to take intellectual shortcuts, react from our threat responses and trauma reactions, and even our need for relationality and belonging get in the way of being the kind of person we are trying to be. The good news is just knowing our capacity for wonky firing helps prevent us dumb-braining, which is why we went into so much detail on these topics. Often, being able to say "there's me back on my bullshit" is enough to help us course correct. But when that's not enough, there are tons of other ways to check your fucked behavior and align your actions with your beliefs.



HOW TO CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR

Resmaa Menakem, in his book *My Grandmother's Hands,* differentiate types of pain as either dirty or clean. This relates to the classic idea of Buddhist philosophy that pain is inevitable but suffering is optional. The pain doesn't change, but our relationship with it does. . . and we can use it to progress as human beings. Resmaa defines dirty pain as "the pain of avoidance, blame, and denial" and clean pain as "pain that mends and can build your capacity for growth."

Doing the work of self-reflection, and behavioral change, is the transformative work of clean pain. But what does that look like in practice?

How do we avoid making the same mistakes over and over again in terms of biased thinking, trauma responsive behavior, and the like? Good old fashioned habit formation. But maybe you are thinking "hey, fuckers. I've already tried to build better habits and failed often and epically enough that I am reading your book so you can help me the fuck out."

Don't worry, we are still gonna help you the fuck out.

We're gonna start with the research on successful habit formation and then jump into all of the specific issues we've discussed above in detail, giving you effective habit formation tools for each.

But first, a pep talk.

Let's start with the world **habit.** We generally use the word habit to mean a frequent behavior we engage in. In psychology, however, habits are actions that are activated as a direct response to

a contextual cue that we have associated with their performance. For example, washing your hands is a habit that (we hope) you associate with going to the bathroom.

So we are looking to put space between our internal reaction and our outward response. A classic adage says "you are not responsible for your first thought, but you are responsible for your second thought and your first behavior." A study at the Naval Postgraduate School about police shootings concluded[3] that taking an extra half second before acting dramatically improves the ability to interpret information before making a decision.

Challenging previous ways of thinking, reacting and interacting is totally doable but will take effort at first. Just like one healthy meal and one trip to the gym doesn't make you fit, changing habitual patterns of mind takes practice. You're literally building new neural pathways and this takes a concerted effort, at first. But it is well worth it because if we take a new simple action (simple works better for the brain than complex) and we repeat that action within certain contexts (meaning we do Y thing when X thing happens), we create associative learning and the behavior gains automaticity. Essentially, after enough conditioning, it doesn't demand conscious attention or this focused motivation to perform the behavior. It becomes automatic.

This is good news for us, because our brains get pretty exhausted from things that require any kind of sustained focus, even important and healthy work like strengthening relationships through accountability. Brains get bored, we lose interest and motivation. But if we have gained automaticity, the brain will continue to do it because it's become our new common action shortcut, which is just as energy saving for the brain as the common heuristics and biases we talked about above.

3 https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=818137

That is to say, "acting right" becomes habitual.

As a teenager, I started getting drunk every day. Within a few months, I felt my body crave malt liquor at the same time each day. It expected the alcohol. Within another year, if I didn't get it, I found myself going to greater and greater measures to remain drunk—at work, at home, and hanging out with my friends. After five years of this behavior, I found myself sitting on a porch swing with two people that I barely knew, drinking 40 ounces of something disgusting. It was like I woke up from a years-long daydream and lucidly thought to myself, "This is not getting me any closer to where I want to be. I have goals and ambitions to start a publishing company. This is actually *taking me away* from my meaning and purpose." I threw my bottle into the street, where it shattered everywhere, swill slowly exiting towards the nearest drain. And for whatever reason, that was the moment that I had my revelation and got fed up with myself. I quit cold turkey and woke up in an ambulance six days later. Hopefully, not all life changes are so dramatic. (And it needs to be said unequivocally that this was not a safe way to quit. Alcohol, like opiods, requires a medical detox. I am lucky that I didn't die while trying to save my own life.)

Finding a way to connect your meaning and purpose to your pain and draw a line to where you want to go is a good way to get started.

Working With Our Reactions in the Immediate

Of course, you will find that choosing how you respond to your feelings is easier said than done. Going back to the classic CBT theoretical stuff and its practical approach that we geeked out on earlier, one of the best things you can do is start capturing the beginning of the process.

Rather than your automatic thoughts happening too quickly to notice, practice being aware of them. They are the chatter that bubbles up *constantly* and *continuously* in our dumb-ass brains. But if we just let our underlying brain chatter wander around unleashed, it will 100% shit the bed pretty quickly.

We're going to say it again because it's important: *you aren't responsible for your first thought (that's the automatic one), but you are responsible for your second thought and your first behavior (that's the part you have control over).* But to gain this control, you first have to *recognize* the initial thought so you can then tell yourself "That's utter crap, I'm not responding to that nonsense." Hopefully, the second thought can lead you into healthier behavior.

Makes sense right?

For practice, think about a situation that was difficult for you recently. If it's one that you are working on accountability-wise that's great, but it could be anything that was uncomfortable or generally negative. What automatic thoughts bubbled up for you? What feelings did you experience? What sensations? Now check in with any thinking traps that you got caught up in based on these thoughts. Notice any patterns?

Ok, so once you start seeing patterns in your automatic thoughts (and yes, we know, ugh. . . why did we ask you to look at that, they're horrible and depressing and that's apparently what's going on up there all day?) we can start to do the deeper work of figuring out how patterns of automatic thoughts have been feeding into our intermediate thoughts and our core beliefs. One of the best tricks for this is called the ***vertical arrow:*** distilling down the patterns in our automatic thoughts and questioning the meaning we have ascribed to them by challenging them.

Some of the challenge question possibilities include:

- If that were true, what would that mean?
- What would be the worst thing about this thought if it is true?
- If that were true, what does that say about you?
- If that were true, what does that say about others?
- If that's true, what's the worst thing that could happen?
- If that's true, what would that mean for the future?

And there we go, that's a classic **negative core belief.** Core beliefs are internal "I" statements, like "I am" or "I can('t)." In this case, we are looking for *negative core beliefs* that fall into three general categories:

Helplessness

Unlovability

Worthlessness

The vertical arrow example to the left shows how an automatic thought about not making a mistake at work is informing and cementing a negative core belief of *worthlessness.* Why is that important?

If you feel worthless. In that true, soul-deep, permanent way there is nothing for you to gain in the world.

Example of this process:

"I can't make any mistakes at work."

If that's true, what would that mean?

"It would mean I'm going to get fired."

If that's true, what would that mean?

"It would mean I won't be able to pay my bills and I will be homeless"

If that's true, what would that mean?

"It would mean I can't do anything right, and I'm a totally dysfunctional human"

And nothing for you to lose.

That idea of fundamental worthlessness isn't something you can earn your way out of. It's not "I'm bad at math so I need to study and do better." It is just the nature of your being. So behaviors that stem from that are often both chaotic and punishing, both internally and externally. Remember when Joe wrote about his problem with alcoholism and theft? He was harboring a self conception of worthlessness.

Unpacking how our own thinking patterns are perpetuating continued mental health issues for us that *then* lead to destructive behavior is one of the first steps of true accountability work, since we are training ourselves to watch our own tendencies and manage them in ways that are proactive rather than reactive. If you start examining the meta-messages behind why you continously engage in certain behaviors (and in Joe's case the answer was *why the fuck not*), you can start dismantling the structure that is supporting them.

Next up? One of the other big issues we discussed in the previous chapter is how the brain creates thinking shortcuts that get us in a shit ton of trouble. Let's learn how to override these shortcuts and enhance our decision making even more.

Training Ourselves to Think

My cousin Jimmy posted a meme stating *"If Black lives matter, why are 9 out of 10 Black people killed by other Black people?"* Let's first call it what it is: a cheap shot. When I politely questioned him about his thought process behind sharing this graphic, Jimmy replied that he wasn't taking a particular stance, he just found it "interesting" and wanted to start a "conversation" (in the grand "devil's advocate" tradition of making

things that don't directly impact your life an intellectual debate). Yes, Jimmy is white. And a boomer.

But back to the meme itself. . . like most memes, it's taking a very narrow slice of key facts and distorting them to make a political point. It's like when Webtrends puts ads on light rail, asking, "Should cyclists pay a road tax?" in perhaps the greatest fundamental misunderstanding of how streets are paid for.

So I did some work around it: I researched some credible sources and asked some journalistic questions. Both questions are inherently misleading. The meme disregards contextual truths, such as the vast majority of crime is "white on white," crime is a product of lack of opportunity, and who you direct criminal behavior against is a product of segregated neighborhoods. That is, you are most likely to kill the people who are near you. The bicycle advertisement ignores the fact that roads are funded from a general tax and bicyclists already subsidize all other users. But obviously the point of both is to suggest and instigate a *"conversation."* Why do shitty tactics like this trick us?

We think of memes as something that was invented with the internetz. But a picture with a little text that is funny or political that we share with others is a cultural artifact that has existed across human history. A meme is *any element of culture or system of behavior designed to be passed on from one cultural member to another.* A fairy tail is a meme. A cave drawing is a meme. Even something silly like the "Kilroy was here" graffiti that began in the 1940s and was so widespread that it is engraved on the National WWII Memorial in Washington, DC is a meme. Memes are designed to have us learn by imitation; to influence our interpretation of the world.

Everything we learn, we learn through imitation. At the most base level of consciousness, we are wired to mimic those around us.

When you see someone yawn, you are compelled to yawn. When you see someone vomit, you are compelled to vomit. This reaction is driven by mirror neurons, and it not only creates greater unity within the group, it has even more base evolutionary benefits. If you witness someone in your tribe vomit, you likely came into contact with the same contagion. This triggers one of our most base emotions of disgust. If your buddy looks terrified, you're likely to mimic that base emotion and feel fear yourself.

Back to racist memes though. In *The War For Kindness: Building Empathy In A Fractured World*, Jamil Zaki suggests that our brain's oxytocin makes us more caring about people in our group while less caring about people outside of it. Theorists have posited that a rejection of those who are different from you (xenophobia in whatever form) starts as a biological drive meant to protect and unify the group that is then exploited by the individuals with the most power in a social network. There is a demonstrable spike in warnings about intercommunal violence and "concerns" about immigration during election season, for example. Calling Covid-19 "the China virus" or "the Kung Flu" is a prescient and recent example (and was so problematic where Faith lives, that the city classified these terms as a form of hate speech that could result in legal consequences).

This isn't to say we are fucked, but it is to say what we need to be aware of and work with our cognitive biases. Trace those first thoughts, particularly as they emerge from within groups you belong to. Along with using exclusion as a protective behavior, humans also have great capacity for operating from a "tend and befriend" response when stressed. Tend and befriend refers to our other evolutionary strength, our ability to nurture those around us and build social networks as another important way of ensuring survival. This response also has

a biobehavioral basis that is mediated by oxytocin and dopaminergic pathways. Because we are social animals we need each other to survive.

We love this recent example that demonstrates how a perfect storm of circumstances that one would think would lead to chaos, led to something wonderful instead. In April 2020, 200 Israelis and Palestinians recovering from COVID-19 were quarantined together in a Jerusalem hotel dubbed "Hotel Corona." The results were broadcast from cell phones inside. The residents ate meals, exercised, and celebrated together. At first, they self-segregated into their own groups. But before long, laughter and the small quarters attracted Jewish people to begin sitting with Arabs, dancing and sunbathing together. And slowly, people found that lifelong views they had held about the other group simply were not true about their new friends.

Residents begin to probe each other with genuine curiousity about interpretations of their various religions, cultural norms, and identities as Israeli or Palestinian and what that means. Quickly, they saw each other not as members of opposing groups but as *people.*

In one instance, a Muslim woman who worked as a janitor in a hospital rushed to help an Orthodox man who had collapsed in a hallway. But wait. Should she, an "unclean woman" touch him even to try to save his life? She decided to and paramedics say that she might be what kept him alive to this day.

For Passover Seder, the hotel staff installed a physical divider in the celebration hall. Orthodox Jews and Palestinians, young and old, tore it down—together. The thought of separate celebrations seemed wrong to them.

When we talk to someone who has different prior experiences and group affiliations, we inherently distrust their intentions and information. When we encounter them face to face, it allows us to see

that other people aren't "bad," they simply have different problems, goals, motivations, and concerns than we do. And that's okay. Cognitive empathy is approaching every conversation with the assumption that other people are attempting to disambiguate their own messages from their brain. By exposing someone to new experiences in this way through trust, we can bridge the divide.

People leave extremist groups after experiencing something unambiguous that recasts all of their other experiences in a new light. Megan Phelps Roper left the Westboro Baptist Church after talking with her now-husband on the Internet. He didn't berate and judge her in the way that she was taught that all outsiders would treat her. Instead, he was patient and accepting. Slowly, in this way, the facade cracks and people can see things differently despite their prior experiences and group affiliations.

In a state of uncertainty, if we can't make sense of a situation and we feel powerless to solve it, our brain will attempt to reduce our anxiety by only seeking out information that confirms that we have nothing to worry about. Psychologists call this "wishful thinking." We decide others are blowing it out of proportion and overreacting. Worse, our brains are able to seek out and find information that confirms just about any—however marginal—perspective on the situation that we are facing.

Anthropologist Riane Eisler has spent decades studying how we can engender our better selves within our larger culture. And since political forces are actively curating divisiveness, it is becoming increasingly obvious that we need to do this work ourselves. This means training ourselves to think more deeply about our heuristics, our biases, and how they are reinforced through the simplicity of meme'ified cultural artifacts (like Jimmy's) in our everyday lives.

We all have a system of breaking down how we take in information, how we make sense of it, and how it applies to our worldview. That system is known as our **elements of thought.** *But that doesn't mean we should believe everything we think.*

We also often fall into the trap of trusting information "vetted" by people in our groups, thinking highly of the speaker or sources. Vetting our own information should be a habitual practice, not a circumstantial one. Faith's mom would do her research before posting news items on social media, and would be irritated that Faith would do her own research before sharing them. It was not a questioning of her mother, but a commitment to herself and her own process. *Because we also shouldn't automatically believe everything our circle thinks.* (FFS, Jimmy.)

Punk rock introduced me to a healthy dose of skepticism from a young age, which was reinforced by feeling excluded everywhere and years of realizing that there were wide gaps in teachers' knowledge about even the subjects they taught. When an English teacher became convinced that Dungeons & Dragons was a path to satanic murder because she'd heard that on the *700 Club*, it became blatantly clear to me that not even those in positions of power necessarily know what the hell they're talking about.

Punk rock has its own shortcomings, chiefly in the group belief that its methods are superior and that all other groups are composed of unscrupulous savages. I'm still occasionally duped and find out that one of my heroes fell for fake news sites or unchecked misinformation, and need to remain vigilant of the same tendency in myself. See, for example the wide crossover in punk rock and the Moon Truther movements. Or the time recently when I heard myself explaining to a co-worker that several writers were credible solely because they were featured on a cool tour of lesbian authors (which obviously speaks nothing in itself

of what makes them interesting as writers or critics). So I obviously still have work to do.

We know we have biases. We know we have socio-centric and ego-centric behaviors. So we need to then challenge our self-determination of right-ness with a level of precision. Let's talk about the **nine universal intellectual standards.** This sounds kind of intense (I mean, *nine*?), but just think of it as mentally reading all the terms and conditions before you click "subscribe" in your own brain.

- Clarity—What kind of elaboration would help you better understand the topic? Are there any examples of illustrations that can be used?
- Accuracy—Is this veribly free from errors or distortions? Did I check?
- Precision—Is there an appropriate level of detail and specificity to this?
- Relevance—Does this information bear directly on the issue at hand?
- Depth—What other variables and complexities might be relevant?
- Breadth—Is this viewpoint comprehensive? Have the views of others been taken into account?
- Logic—Does this all fit together logically without contradictions?
- Fairness—Is this free from bias, favoritism, and injustice?
- Significance—Does this even fucking matter? (JIMMY???)

Maybe She's Born with It, Maybe It's Bullshit Propaganda

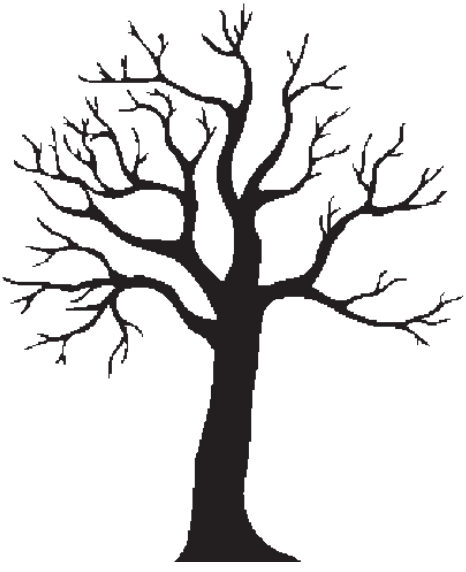
Along with challenging our heuristics and biases with solid intellectual standards, it's also really helpful to attend to whether or not someone is intentionally misleading us in order to shape our opinion and behavior. When it is advertising, it's pretty overt, though it's still a really good thing to practice noticing. When it's individuals in leadership positions (from heads of state to the head of the department we work in to the head of our social circle), paying attention to the tactics being deployed is an important part of not swallowing bullshit.

The systematic study of propaganda has been around for close to 100 years. Edward Filene helped form the Institute of Propaganda Analysis in 1937 with the goal of educating the public on the propaganda techniques that are used to shift opinion and thus behavior in deceptive ways. They identified seven main categories of propaganda which can be really helpful to our ability to notice that what someone is telling us is some bullshit manipulation.

- **Bandwagon**: This technique is all about feeding that fear we all have of being alone. If the illusion exists that "everyone" feels a certain way or does a certain thing, we are more likely to go along with those things in order to not feel isolated.
- **Card-Stacking**: This refers to the technique of collecting all the data points that are in favor of whatever idea is being sold to us. By stacking up fact after fact in favor, without addressing other possibilities, it makes the idea seem obvious and conclusive.
- **Glittering Generalities**: This is when people speak in slogans and catchphrases that simplify something complex into something generally agreed upon like values or freedom. They

are also super hard to disprove because they aren't substantive to begin with. (You know, stuff you see on political billboards such as "real change for real people" or whatever).

- **Name Calling**: This is when terms that are derogatory or generally negative are used in conjunction with a person or group of people in order to cultivate suspicions, dislike, and prejudice which will make discriminatory actions more palatable.
- **Plain Folks**: This the tactic of people taking on our characteristics to demonstrate that they have the same concerns and fears that we do. They are trying to create the idea that we are all on the "same team" in order to appear trustworthy.
- **Testimonial**: This is when someone who appears respected and trustworthy attests to the validity of an idea (think celebrity endorsement).
- **Transfer**: This is what happens when an idea is imposed upon some kind of revered symbol in order to invoke an emotional response. (Think "criticising this policy is like stomping on the American flag.")



UNPACKING OUR OWN HISTORY

Unfucking Our Mental Health Paradigm: Power Threat Meaning (PTM)

So you know how most therapy and trauma healing and stuff is about figuring out what is not working in your brain and teaching you coping skills and new tricks to make it work? And how they tell you that even if you feel like the rest of the world is crazy, the real answer to your own behavior, feelings, and thinking lies within your own mental processes, self-control, and agency?

What if that weren't true? What if your brain is doing exactly what a healthy brain is designed to do. . . just in response to a threat? What if the trauma you have experienced, coupled with the power dynamics in the world around you are the problem, not you?

This is actually a really new idea in mental health. That's why adding Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1980 was a huge undertaking—it meant recognizing that mental health diagnoses could have an external etiology. Which is just a fancy way of saying that humans can be broken by what happens to us, we aren't just fucked up because of whatever gene combination we inherit.

Flash forward a few decades. As we learn more about how the brain and body work and we learn more about how trauma (both individual and systemic) impacts the brain and body in the long term, we are realizing that many, if not most, mental health issues have

either an external etiology or at least are greatly impacted by the world around us.

If you were bit by a dog, your brain panics when you see a dog. You can't access your thinking brain to notice that it's a tiny service dog and poses no harm or threat. Our brains lie to us to try to tell us what should be true for our own safety.

Maybe we didn't buy the ticket but it is now, officially, both our circus and our monkey.

Here's a framework that was developed by a bunch of smart people for figuring out why your brain is freaking out at you:

It's called the Power Threat Meaning (PTM) framework and it says that threatening power dynamics experienced during your brain's development or adulthood have created systems in your brain that produce the symptoms leading to your diagnosis. For example, if you have social anxiety, it's probably due to your early experiences, maybe coupled with some predisposition to an anxiety disorder. If we considered the whole context of your life, we'd probably treat you a lot differently than just based on a diagnosis.

Instead of saying that we are biologically wired for mental health and that negative events help bring those predispositions into being, PTM is a theory that says it's the opposite. With very few exceptions, we aren't born with "broken brains," but our experiences (and even the experiences of our biological family members!) create survival-based adaptations that can cause mental health issues in the long term. We learn these adaptations by engaging with the negative experiences imposed on our lives by those with power over us, be they an individual, a group, a culture, or a political system.

PTM says: It's the trauma. It's how culture impacts our day to day lives. It's the toxic hierarchical structure of contemporary society

that privileges certain experiences over others. These things create what we call sickness.

Treating all mental health diagnosis as a broken brain isn't helpful. It does a huge disservice to all the surrounding life events that have impacted and/or contributed to that diagnosis. Everything that happens to us happens within the context of our lives. Understanding the role traumatic events have played in someone's clinical depression is just as important as understanding how someone's work in a coal mine contributed to their lung cancer.

When a mental health professional gives you a diagnosis, what they're typically doing is looking at your symptoms and seeing if they can find a label that matches what they see and/or what you tell them. With the exception of some neurological diagnoses (like autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities, some forms of dementia, and some kinds of thought disorders) most of our diagnoses are based on this sort of guesswork. Basically, we look at what we can see behaviorally or what you tell us about your internal experiences and go down a checklist. For example, if you're listless, have bad hygiene, and have no interest in stuff? According to our checklist, you're suffering from clinical depression.

Ok, though. How might treatment be different if we approached this "depression" with the additional information regarding power, threat, meaning, and threat responses? It could be life changing, even world changing, right? Not only would it provide more insight into how to help each individual person, it also begs for more social justice involvement. Staying well in a broken system is an almost impossible task.

Unfortunately, systemic change doesn't take place until it takes hold in the center. . . even if the margins had to shove it into that

position inch by inch. The PTM Framework, however, has the capacity to make needed changes to how we should understand diagnosis. Firstly, because it came from a mainstream organization instead of a rowdy band of rabble rousers on the margins of the field. This means the decades of rabble rousing by marginalized individuals has infiltrated from the margins to the center and larger, cultural change is happening.

And secondly, the PTM framework is effective. And thoughtful. And expansive. And inclusive. And generally a great structure from which to reconceptualize therapeutic and community care.

This model doesn't replace other practices or models of treatment. Most existing treatments are very helpful to recovery. . . in their proper place. And that proper place is understanding symptoms for what they are: Not signs of an underlying disease but very human threat responses.

In psychology speak, this framework means adding a "contextual focus" in psychiatric diagnoses. So for instance, anxiety or depression or a personality disorder or bipolar doesn't occur because something's inherently wrong with you. It's given to you by your environment.

So how does the PTM framework work? It starts by asking the following questions:

- How has power operated in your life? What kinds of things happened to you because power was wielded over you in harmful ways? This could be anything from growing up with a domineering parent to experiencing systemic racism to living through a war.
- What kinds of threats did this pose to you? How did this harmful use of power against you cause harm to you or

otherwise affect you? For instance, maybe now you can't stand being around someone yelling, or maybe you lost a leg.

- What meaning did you develop based on these situations and experiences? How did you make sense of these experiences? What did they tell you about the world and other people in it? Maybe you learned that all people in authority are potential threats to your safety, or that loud bangs mean you or someone around you will be hurt or killed.
- What kind of threat response did you develop due to these events? What did you do to survive? How did you cope? How did you behave to protect yourself? Perhaps now you literally don't hear someone's words when they're yelling, or you feel compelled to physically attack any sort of authority figure.

So how do we infuse the PTM into healing work in a practical way? At the time of this writing, the framework hasn't been operationalized into practice anywhere.

But the PTM Framework authors have suggestions. One is that narrative approaches are an excellent tool. Telling stories about our experiences is how we help process them, understand them, and create meaning in our lives. This process helps us recognize that we are survivors with continued capacity to grow and thrive.

Unpacking Your Past

What events in your life had a negative impact on you? In other words, what scared you, threatened your security, harmed you, or traumatized you? It's generally easier to compile this as a timeline in five-year increments because it can be hard to remember things in great detail, especially from periods where we were really young and/or there was a lot going on.

In addition, sometimes terrible things are normalized around us to the point that we don't even register them as traumatic. . . take a look at the list at the end of this chapter for possible traumatic events to see if there is anything you might have forgotten or missed. Go ahead and create your timeline, then consider the list and make a note of anything you realized merits adding.

- What events had an impact on your parents and other caregivers?
- How did those events inform their interactions with you?
- What social systems were in place that exacerbated these negative experiences?
- What social systems are in place that continue to operate as a barrier to healing in the present?
- What were the consequences of your negative life events?
- How did these events impact your daily life? Surroundings?
- How did they impact your relationships at the time?
- How did they impact your physical body?
- How did they impact your view of yourself? What feelings did you notice? What did you tell yourself about your experience?
- How did they impact your behaviors? Meaning. . . what did you need to do to survive?
- What rules did you figure out about how the world works based on these events?
- How did you come to define "normal" based on these experiences?
- What labels have been used to describe you (diagnoses, things people called you based on your behavior)?

- Which of these labels are still used to describe you, either by others or by your internal voice?
- How did you expect others to treat you and/or interact with you? We don't exist in isolation, but in interactions with others which we then use to create rules about the world. These rules are often in the form of "If I _____, other people will _____." Write down the rules you've learned:
    - If I am hurt, other people will:
    - If I am scared, other people will:
    - If I am angry, other people will:
    - If I am peaceful, other people will:
    - If I am honest, other people will:
    - If I am expressive, other people will:
    - If I am…

Unpacking Now

- How does this all fit together to inform your present reality? What is your story of survival?
- What skills did you develop to survive? Both in your external works and your internal understanding of these events?
- What labels or descriptions best describe your experience?
- What social and political systems are in place that limit your access to healing and wellness?
- What makes you strong?
- How do you demonstrate your strength?
- What abilities do you have that you didn't have in the past?

- What resources do you have that you didn't have in the past?
- What power do you have that cannot be taken from you regardless of your circumstances?
- How would you describe who and where you are at this moment in your life?
- What areas do you want to build strength in?
- What would your life look like if things were ideal for you?
- What systems changes would support that process?
- What work do you need to do for your own self growth?
- What assistance do you need from others that is in their power to provide?
- What resources do you need to access?

List of Potential Traumas

Where does all that trauma come from? Here is a more exhaustive, but still incomplete, list of common sources of trauma:

- **Child Abuse** (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect): Child abuse is a huge category, and even the federal government has struggled to define it well. But essentially, any act (or failure to act/intervene) that harms a child or puts a child at imminent risk of harm is abuse. The younger the child, the more powerless and fragile they are, the more limitations there are to them being able to defend themselves or speak out, the more risk there is for serious, ongoing abuse.
- **Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence** (physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological): Domestic violence occurs in intimate partner/romantic relationships among

both youth and adults. You do not have to be sharing a living space with your romantic partner for it to be considered domestic violence. The U.S. Department of Justice notes a few differences in the types of violence that can occur in intimate partner relationships beyond physical abuse: Emotional abuse includes attacks on the partner's self-worth (e.g., criticism, name-calling). Psychological abuse is more action-oriented, and can consist of isolating the partner, threatening harm to them or others that they care about, or destroying items that have meaning to them (without physically abusing them or other people). Economic abuse focuses on the way a partner creates a situation wherein they have total economic control in the relationship, forcing the abused partner to remain with them (controlling all of the money, or not letting them have a job or get job training, for example).

- **Elderly/Disabled Adult Abuse** (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, exploitation): Unlike the above category, where the relationship is considered an equal one (until manipulated to be otherwise), some adults are considered by law to be powerless and fragile, and therefore have the same protections under the law that children are due. These individuals include older adults and individuals with physical or mental health impairments. The one main difference between child abuse and elderly/disabled abuse is the concept of exploitation. An adult with income (for example, social security or retirement income) may have the use of that income exploited by another individual. While many adults have individuals who help them manage their money effectively and make sure their needs are met, there are others who go without basic necessities because their money is being mismanaged or stolen by their "caretaker."

- **Impaired Caregiver:** Unlike in the above cases, caregivers who are not causing intentional harm or neglectful practices may still have their own impairments that make it difficult to render care, which can have a negative impact on the individuals they care for. For example, a child with a parent being treated for cancer may struggle with not having all their needs met. Couple this with the anxiety of watching the illness and decline of the person who is their primary means of support and one of the people they love most in the world, and it can be a huge source of trauma.
- **School Violence:** School violence can consist of one-time, sentinel events (like a school shooting), or by the product of chronically dangerous school conditions (gang warfare, drug use, drug sales, fighting, etc.). If an individual is engaged in a school environment, and witnesses, partakes in, or is a victim of violence within it, that can be considered a traumatic event.
- **Bullying/Cyberbullying:** Bullying is the use of one's strength or influence to control the actions of another. It can include real violence, the threat of violence, or intimidation to wield power over another. The traditional form of bullying is the older kid taking the lunch money of the younger one. But in the digital age, bullying can take many different forms. Electronic communication allows new ways of bullying to take place—from a distance and with anonymity in an increasing number of cases. This has allowed individuals who wouldn't normally have power over our lives to wreak serious havoc. Serious bullying experiences are often tied to a trauma response. Research that Faith did in her local community mental health agency demonstrated that an enormous portion of the children and youth that were brought to the mental

health crisis center identified being bullied as the reason for their mental health crisis (often expressed in the form of suicidal or homicidal ideation). We need to remind ourselves how incredibly important it is that we recognize the impact bullying can have on our emotional health and wellbeing.

- **Community Violence:** Living or working in certain communities can also pose a risk for trauma exposure. We can experience one time, sentinel events (again, such as a shooting), or be exposed to violence on a regular basis by the nature of the common experiences found in our community (drug use, fighting, etc.). Most community violence can be tied to neighborhoods that have been left impoverished of hope, opportunity, and money. Many of the other categories in this list could also fall under the broad category of "community violence," but are widespread enough to merit their own section.
- **Sexual Violence**: Sexual violence crosses all cultural and economic barriers, and often falls under the domain of child abuse or domestic partner violence. Other forms of sexual violence very well could fall under the heading of community violence. Sexual violence can include sexual assault (penetration of someone's body, also know as rape; attempted penetration; unwanted sexual touching or fondling, attempted unwanted sexual touching or violence; forcing the victim to perform sexual acts). Sexual harassment, while less physicially violating, can also be intensely traumatic as well. Sexual harassment can include sexual comments, requests for sexual favors, unwelcome sexual advances, or even negative commentary about one's gender in general.

- **Medical** (illness or accident): Dealing with the negative impact of a health crisis (either a significant but short-term illness or a chronic condition) can be intensely traumatic. There's the loss of function and freedom from the health problem itself, and then there's the stress of accessing needed care and struggling to pay for it. Individuals with chronic, debilitating diseases that can be treated but not cured have to struggle with coming to terms with a "new normal," whether it be a physical or mental health issue. And many know that this disease will eventually no longer be treatable—and the decline accompanying that experience is terrifying.
- **Natural or Human-made Disasters**: Natural disasters are events such as tornadoes, earthquakes, and floods that decimate our communities. Human-made disasters have a similar impact, but are the result of human action or inaction (such as industrial accidents like Chernobyl or the Exxon Valdez spill). There can be significant overlap between the two, as human failure in planning for or engaging in appropriate action around a natural disaster worsens the consequences (e.g., studies of the Hurricane Katrina floods demonstrate that the majority of the flooding was due to faulty levees installed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).
- **War/Terrorism:** The standard definitions of these terms assume that war is engaged in between willing participants with agreed-upon terms, while terrorism is conducted by renegades and targets innocent bystanders. Clearly, this isn't an accurate definition. . . however, the perception of one form of violence being more acceptable than the other has often led to a lack of understanding about the trauma inherent in both. While we expect and empathize with the suffering of

the innocent bystander, the individuals who willingly serve as soldiers are also likely to struggle with PTSD or other trauma-related symptoms. According to the VA, 10-30% of soldiers have suffered PTSD sometime during their return home after being in a conflict (the statistics vary based on the service era). The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs released a statistic in 2013, citing approximately 22 veteran suicides occurring per day. No matter our role in combat situations, the impact can be devastating.

- **Forced Displacement:** We are sometimes forced to leave the only place we have known as home. Oftentimes these reasons are for our own safety, but it can still be traumatic. It is important to remember that whether you are leaving war-torn Syria as a refugee or being placed in a foster home due to a parent's inability to provide adequate care, leaving your home and community is a trauma in and of itself. No matter how dire the circumstances, being placed in new and unfamiliar surroundings requires a huge shift in thinking and behavior that is immensely difficult.
- **Traumatic Grief/Bereavement:** While grief is a normal part of the human experience, some people struggle with intense loss in a similar way to other traumatic events, and they are unable to process the loss in a way that allows them to move forward. Oftentimes traumatic grief is tied to losing someone in an unexpected or particularly brutal way, and while that may make a trauma reaction more likely, traumatic grief is not predicated on a certain kind of death. Traumatic grief happens when we aren't able to properly mourn the loss of someone. There is a level of separation distress from the lost person, a preoccupation with them which may include

a hypervigilance of the environment searching for them, struggling to acknowledge their death, a wish to be reunited with them, feeling futile about the world without them, etc. This isn't to say there is anything wrong with mising someone and being really fucking sad, but traumatic grief continues to reinforce itself and get worse over time rather than slowly getting better. It continues to impact life domain functioning the way any other PTSD reaction would.

- **Systems Trauma:** Individuals who are subject to some sort of system are also at risk for a trauma response. For example, children in foster care or the juvenile justice system may struggle with the trauma associated with the events that resulted in their entering the system, the trauma of the displacement experience, and then the continued trauma of having very little power and control over their experience within the system. Not knowing what your future will look like, being unable to form support networks due to continued movement and staff turnover, and not being able to obtain accurate information about your situation are all common experiences. A system itself often perpetuates its own, ongoing form of trauma that cannot be discounted when we look at the experiences that shape us.
- **Intergenerational Trauma:** Historical oppression (think colonization and enslavement) and its consequences are often transmitted through generations. This can be seen in the practical effects of oppression through structural, systemic disempowerment happening in the present, *as well as within our literal genetic code.* Trauma experienced by our ancestors (not just our parents and grandparents) altered their epigenomes, which then had a high likelihood of being inherited by us,

leading to an increased likelihood in continuing cycles of pain. This is a complicated topic and a relatively new field of study (Faith's entire dissertation was on one type of trauma response in one specific cultural group alone), but what our families have endured to bring us to where we are today is an important consideration in our trauma work.

This list is intended to start conversations, and maybe help you realize the legitimacy of some of your life experiences as being traumatic. And while this list is more inclusive than one you will read in the DSM, it may not fit your e*xact* circumstances. In fact, it very likely won't. Trauma doesn't operate by checking the right box in the right category, so we hope that you will believe us when we say your experiences and reactions are valid and real and you are worthy of care and the opportunity to heal.

Ideally, understanding how your experiences have affected you can become an amazing tool for you to share with your therapist while you do work on figuring out healthier coping skills and newer neural pathways. We also know that may not be something you have access to for a multitude of reasons, and you may be doing this on your own for the time being.

Either way, this is a useful starting point. We often talk about how understanding our history and the patterns it has created is like putting something under the microscope for the first time. Not just because we are getting a closer look, but because in order to see what we are looking at we have to flip on a light. And the minute we do, whatever we are looking at will react to that light. Noticing is the biggest part of changing. We can't negotiate with our body and brain if we don't know where the response is coming from, right? Building new patterns has to make sense. . . or we are going to revert back to the responses that made sense in the past.

WORKING WITH THE SHADOW

Carl Jung may have died in 1961, but his work continues to be directly influential on our understanding of the human psyche, especially when it comes to transpersonal psychology. You are probably thinking that is something you've never heard of and you definitely don't fuck with. But transpersonal psychology just refers to all of the states of consciousness that exist beyond the personal level of our psyche; what exists in our personal unconscious, the collective unconscious, and how we interact with cultural archetypes.

For the sake of our work here, we will be mainly focusing on *the shadow,* which refers to the part of our psyche that we consider negative and undesirable. But this part functions as part of a greater whole. Seems complicated? You aren't the only one. Complication was Jung's jam. No stress, let's look at the basics of what this all means. According to Jung:

Ego: Jung's definition refers to the story we tell about ourselves. The ego is how Jung defines the conscious mind, all of our thoughts, emotions, and memories that we have in awareness. It's our identity and our understanding of our storyline across time.

Persona: The persona is our outward, simplified expression of the ego. It's essentially our public expression of our personality and our training to be obedient to expectations (ugh).

Shadow: The shadow is a purely emotional aspect of our personality that lies in opposition to the ego. According to Jung, the shadow lies outside the conscious mind and has its own level of autonomy.

Anima-Animus: Jung expressed that within our unconscious there are qualities that are traditionally thought to belong to individuals of the opposing gender. He felt it important to integrate the aspects of our personality that are of our anima or animus in order to be fully whole and authentic. While Jung didn't write about individuals who existed outside of the gender binary, anyone who exists in a more gender fluid state has brought forth a deep and conscious awareness of their anima and animus and lives this truth within their everyday expression of ego through persona.

Self: Jung referred to a person who has overcome the limitations of their persona, recognized their ego-consciousness and moved beyond it to embrace their shadow (as well as their anima/animus balance) to be a person who has the capacity to reach their full potential (Jung referred to it as "the God within us"). If that seems complicated, think of it as being your authentic self before life imposed so many weird rules and conformity notions on you.

What's the point of working with the shadow? Jung stated *"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."* When we repress pain or repress our emotional self that balances our public-facing self, we cause continued harm to ourselves and others. When Jung said that integrating the shadow is vital to being our integrated, authentic self he was saying:

1. We are less likely to engage in destructive behaviors.
2. We have better boundaries with those around us.
3. Our relationships are better because we better understand and accept ourselves and others
4. Our communication skills improve

5. Our physical health improves because we are not carrying the types of mental and emotional anguish that creates inflammatory damage in the body.

So how does one "do" shadow work? It's self-reflection work, which means journaling, meditation, and other means of processing. (Jung also thought that using concepts of archetypes can be helpful to shadow work but that's a worksheet of a different color.)

It's really important to have some good grounding skills before starting shadow work in your mental health toolkit. Shadow work is difficult and really activating, so having ways to stay safe in your body is really important. If you find yourself feeling really overwhelmed, there is more shadow work support in the workbook that accompanies this book including questions for self check-in and an emotional regulation skill called TIPP, which stands for temperature, intense exercise, paced breathing, progressive muscle relaxation.

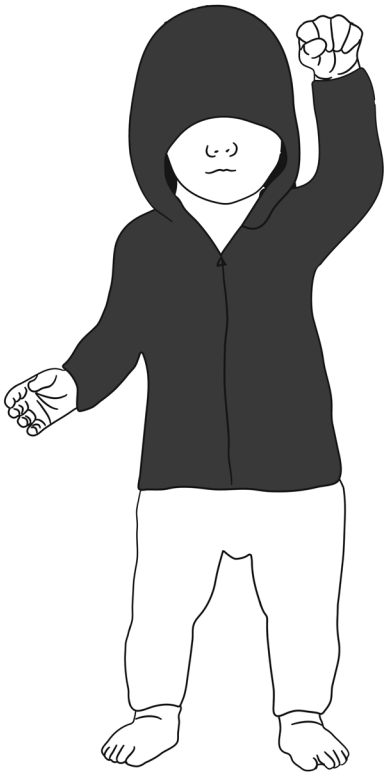
Shadow Work Questions for Introspection

- What kinds of emotions do you try to avoid?
- What kinds of people do you try to avoid?
- What dreams have you had that upset you the most? What happened within them?
- If you could erase one memory what would it be?
- What do you not like about yourself?
- What makes you feel the most insecure?
- What aspects of your life are most disconcerting to you?

- What kinds of issues are you most likely to hold grudges about?
- What have you held a grudge about the longest?
- Which kinds of irrational fears are most likely to hold you back?
- Which irrational fear has been the biggest barrier to you recently?
- What are your bad habits?
- What prevents you from "breaking" them?
- What kinds of lies do you tell yourself?
- In what ways are you regularly hypocritical?
- What is the biggest promise you've made to yourself that you broke?
- What relationships do you hold on to that are unhealthy?
- In what other ways do you self-sabotage?

Shadow Work Meditation

- Take some deep abdominal breaths.
- Delve into your uncomfortable emotion. Where is it in your body? What sensations are you experiencing?
- Ask yourself, "What are these emotions and sensations trying to teach me? What do I need to understand about this situation?"
- Let your sensations and emotions move and shift. Notice what they do with curiosity instead of judgement.
- Jot down any observations you made or insights you had.



CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

Now that you hopefully have a better understanding of why you behave the way that you do, it's time to make a plan. First, you need to know what your intention is, what is within your control or not, and then you can define and set your goals within that.

Intention Setting

While researching this book, Faith sent me a meme depicting the Rock looking stern that reads "When you focus on you, you grow. When you focus on shit, shit grows. Read that again." It sounds hokey, like some new age bullshit. But there is actual brain science behind it. When I lived life intent on showing other people how I was wronged, the outcome was the opposite. I was entirely focused on the negative experiences of my life with an agenda outside of my control. When I decided to improve communication in my relationships, I was shocked how immediately successful I was at progressing my goals. I no longer felt like I was running into a brick wall over and over.

Most of us are used to the idea of goal setting. Goals are about specific, measurable, and quantifiable outcomes. And goal setting is important, so we are not suggesting to give that up. But. . . in day to day life there are many things that are out of our control that can affect our goal attainment (Covid-19 in 2020, anyone?).

Intention setting is about how we focus our energy on a day to day basis. It's about what we set our minds to notice. If you are looking to purchase a new bike, you are going to notice the bikes around you in a completely different way, right? Intention setting can be in service of our goals, but it is also about how we pay attention to and how we interact in the world. In Faith's previous book *Unf#ck Your*

Boundaries (Microcosm Publishing, 2020), she wrote about how we take in 11 million bits of information every second of the day but can only consciously attend to about 50 bits.

Intention setting helps us pay attention to the 50 bits that best serve us, by setting an instruction for your brain to refocus your conscious processes. In the case of bike shopping, we may have set that intention consciously, but it generally happens just because the background operational system of our brain is thinking "new bike!" Intention setting makes that process overt and systematic. You are choosing which pieces of information to consider relevant.

This is especially important when we realize that the background operational system of the brain is watching for threats to our safety and survival more than anything else. It's not that we want to turn that off, but it does mean that we need to recognize we are wired for the negative in most of our interactions.

Intentions are about how we want to interact in the world, what we want to notice, and who we want to be. This will end up supporting our goal attainment. This is what people mean when they say that "living well is the best revenge" after a bad breakup. You can't convince your ex that they were wrong, but you can live a happy life. Or you risk losing many years trying to make your point instead.

You can consciously pay attention to opportunities to advance your goals but successful humaning stands apart (and above) our goal achievement. So let's start with our locus of control.

Make a list of all of the things you do not have control over. Then make a list of all of the things that you do have control over.

In some way, shape, or form, your answers should shed light on the fact that you do not have control over the behaviors of others, but you do have control over yourself right? This is important, because the

intentions you set need to be grounded in your own locus of control. While "I don't want to argue with anyone" is a nice goal to have, you don't have control over the argumentative nature of someone else. An intention of "I will presume the best intent of those around me" will help prevent you from starting an argument *and* will go a long way in helping you manage an argument started by someone else.

Intention Examples May Include:

1. I intend to be accountable for my actions
2. I intend to not take the behaviors of others personally
3. I intend to pause before reacting in all circumstances
4. I intend to be hopeful about the future
5. I intend to speak as kindly to myself as I would to anyone else I love

Accountability Goal Setting

Ready to be accountable? Complete these exercises (an expanded version of this list with room to write appears in the accompanying workbook):

1) What, exactly, do you want to change about yourself? State this in positive and behaviorally focused terms, e.g. "I want to listen to the viewpoints of others without interrupting in order to understand where they are coming from" is far more doable than "I want to stop being a judgemental asshole."

2) Why do YOU want to change this about yourself? i.e. Why is this a personal priority?

3) How will making these changes improve your life?

4) How do you hope these changes will improve life for people you care about?

5) How do you hope these changes will impact future relationships?

6) Will anyone in your life be negatively affected by this change? Remember that any change to a system affects the whole system. Even good change can throw others into disequilibrium. If you stop drinking, that may mean others can no longer play the role of rescuer and enabler. And those roles may be their way of not having to work through their own shit and they may have a negative response to your change in behavior.

7) What do you think would be a reasonable timeline/goal to actualize this change?

8) How much time will you need to set aside each week for work to make this happen? For what specific activities? How will they fit into your schedule?

9) What are some harmful or painful memories or experiences from your past that you haven't yet fully resolved?

10) What feedback and criticisms have other people given to you or have you heard secondhand about your behavior? Why do you think people say them?

11) Which of these criticisms can you accept as valid and apply to your own behavior?

12) Which of these pieces of feedback about your behavior do you feel like don't apply and are probably other people's shit?

13) What help do you need in making this happen? Who can you rely upon for that help who would understand where you are coming from?

14) Where can you research best practices from people who have overcome this problem in the past? Can you reach out to them directly?

15) What are your best practices for moving forward? What are the actionable steps?

16) Make a list of your needs.

17) What are some actionable steps to live closer to those values?

18) What are three incidents when your intent was good but your impact was damaging?

19) When you aren't too bummed out, make a list of the things that you've lost as a result of the behavior that you are trying to change. If you are working with a therapist, coach, sponsor, etc., getting support for this part may be beneficial.

20) How do you attempt to fulfill your needs and/or medicate your pain now?

21)What are some other possible strategies to get these needs met that you are willing to experiment with trying?

22) What needs are the objectionable behaviors trying to fulfill?

23) What is your motivation in acting out your current behaviors? What caused them in the first place?

24) Who can help keep you accountable to these changes you want to make?

25) How do you know when you've succeeded and have been accountable?

26) What circumstances and relationships in your life are holding you back from your goal? Who is helping you achieve it?

27) Are you finding yourself falling into patterns of feeling shame and judging yourself? How so?

28) What are some ways you can challenge those thoughts, feelings, and reactions?

29) Where and with whom are you succeeding?

30) Where and with whom are you struggling?

31) Who is one person you can apologize to without causing further damage to them? What are you apologizing for?

32) What are some ways that you can make amends with how you've hurt this person and betrayed their trust?

33) How can you demonstrate long term change as you progress?

34) What are some ways that you can give back to help other people who have struggled in the same areas and ways as yourself?

The Accountability WOOP

Psychology professor Gabriele Oettingen found that fantasizing about making something happen has—surprisingly—a negative effect on our ability to make it happen. She noticed after coming to the U.S. from Germany that we have a cultural norm of "we can do anything!" while her upbringing was more pragmatic. Not necessarily negative,

but German culture is more grounded in reality and thoughtful about goal setting. So she studied how Americans interacted with their goals differently and how this played out.

Faith has written dozens of books about the storytelling brain but if you haven't read her other stuff, what you need to know is that the brain tells stories to retain information and plan for safety. The brain does this with so much realism that it tricks us into thinking the story is the reality. So a fantasy about changing a behavior *feels like we actually already changed the behavior,* rather than a mental rehearsal planning session. So we become *less* likely to do the actual behavioral change work.

If we are mindful that fantasizing is only the first step in goal acquisition and use it to propel us to the next step, we can overcome that irritating brain quirk and increase our likelihood of achieving our goals. Rather than calling the findings of her best practices, "Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions" (MCII) which is frankly *awful*, Oettingen came up with Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan (WOOP).

Oettingen's method is simple enough to make implementation easier. Plus it's a fun acronym. Her studies were mostly about asking someone out, but consider it in the context of accountability.

Wish—What is it that you are wanting to accomplish, achieve, or change? It's OK for it to be a reach, but it should be a feasible reach. Essentially, what's the goal?

Outcome—How will achieving this goal make you feel? What's your best result? Really lean into why this achievement could be important for you.

Obstacle—What is the main obstacle *inside you* that may get in the way of your achievement. This ties back to intention setting in that

it's about what you have control over, not how you are hoping other people respond. If we were using asking someone out as an example, the obstacle might be your shyness in asking them, not that they might say no.

Plan—What is an effective way of managing that obstacle. Make a "when/then" plan. An example would be "when I feel overwhelmed by everything there is to do, then I will set the time and work for ten minutes on the project then take a break."

Dr. Oettingen and her team created an app for WOOPing if you want to digitize your badassery.

Therapy, Coaching, Mentoring, and Accountability Partnerships

While group accountability sessions haven't historically been helpful, the opinions of people that know us well enough to observe patterns can be. Especially if it is the people who don't have any kind of hidden negative agenda. Faith always says that if her best friend tells her she's being a bitch it's because. . . she's being a bitch. And he loves her and wants her to figure out why she's so cranky and adjust herself. He's not saying it to make her feel bad or silence her or whatever.

I have always been perplexed by the commonality of hearing one person admit to bad behavior and someone else commiserating in a way that lets them off the hook. Like "well of course you screamed at the barista, you were so frustrated and upset at that point, OMG!" My autistic brain remains very confused that the commiserating friend wasn't saying "That's such a hurtful and unproductive way to communicate. Is this how you interact with people when I'm not around? I'm really upset about this!" Then research for this book led me to the distinction between idiot compassion and wise compassion. Just

like clean pain and dirty pain, compassion also exists in the dialectic. And it all made sense.

Idiot compassion is when you console someone for something that is really their own fault. Like if you said something insensitive or got fired from a job, it *feels good* to have a friend empathize. The problem is that it doesn't allow you to see your own role or encourage change. It serves to shift the blame and let you off the hook, rather than encourage reflection.

Wise compassion, on the other hand, is a friend loving you by asking questions about patterns in your behavior. While observations that hold truth can feel like an attack, when a friend that we trust exhibits wise compassion we are being offered a rare moment to reflect on the patterns in our life and how they are taking us away from who we want to be. And let's be honest. It's far easier to commiserate. . . so someone speaking to our patterns kindly is a gift that requires as much vulnerability on their part as it does on your part.

Wise compassion still starts with compassion—the idea that someone is hurting even if they hurt themselves or someone else. It's recognizing and validating their emotions as authentic even when the resulting behavior was hurtful.

> "I can tell that is a frustrating situation for you, but yelling at the barista is not who you are as a person. If you're overwhelmed right now, maybe I can help with that."

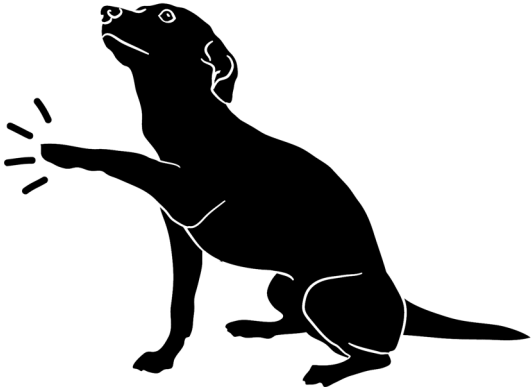
> "I'm so sorry you got fired from your job, I can tell you're angry and frustrated. You've really struggled to keep a job this year, I wonder if we can figure out the pattern and problem solve around it."

Faith refers to being this kind of friend (or therapist, or coach, or accountability partner) as being *kind but not nice.* Nice lets us off the

hook and if we are off the hook we aren't doing the introspective work of change. Kind recognizes the struggle but still holds space for change. Kind tells someone "I know your heart and I want others to see it as well."

When you are experiencing hardship or difficult realizations, you can practice these skills with yourself. You can wallow in your own misery or you can look at your failure to suit everyone's needs using your thinking brain with a distanced objectivity. Remember, doing "bad things" does not make you a "bad person." You likely had a motivation with a different intent than the impact you had. So take some time to explore that as well.

- What is the kernel of truth in what you say?
- What aspects can you take fault for?
- What are the things that set you off?
- Why were those things hurtful or even triggering?
- Are there any threads that you can pull on to find greater revelations about consistencies in your own behavior?
- What were you trying to accomplish?
- How did this situation play out differently than you expected?
- Did you accomplish what you wanted or needed?
- How can you apply yourself differently in the future so that everyone can get what they need?



ATONEMENT, FORGIVENESS, AND REPENTANCE: ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

Forgiveness is a universal human need. It is a topic for consideration in all religious texts and many philosophical ones (Kant most notably). It's one of the eight positive emotions, according to George Valliant. (And guess what? Compassion is another of the eight).

Forgiveness often sets the stage for relationship repair. While Faith has written quite a bit on forgiving others, here we are writing about putting accountability into action through the practice of requesting forgiveness. Forgiveness is only part of the repair process, however. In order to look at this work holistically, we ended up borrowing heavily from a 4000 years-old tradition.

Scholars of Judaism note significant differences between the terms "atonement," "forgiveness," and "repentance," which are incredibly helpful to our discussion here, if only as a philosophical stance. Meaning, you don't have to celebrate passover or worship any deities to find this helpful to your own internal work.

Repentance in Hebrew is "Tshuva" which means *to return.* So when we discuss our value system and moral alignment, think of repentance as *a return to alignment.* It minimizes our risk of causing more harm in the future, therefore is considered *the work of ethical self-transformation.* We can always grow and change and become better

even though we can't often un-do past harm. We can take responsibility, repair as much as possible, and do better in the future.

Ok, so if repentance is our internal work, our outward expression of that work takes place within forgiveness and atonement. **Forgiveness** is the hoped-for outcome of our expression of regret through apology, and **atonement** is the actions we take beyond our apology to create healing. Repentance work, then, is a lengthy process, not just a tearful voicemail (or press conference, as the case may be).

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg explains "there are specific steps to repentance work:

1. Owning the harm perpetrated (ideally publicly)
2. Doing the work to become the kind of person who doesn't do harm (which requires a ton of inner work)
3. Making restitution for harm done, in whatever way possible
4. *Then* apologizing for the harm caused in whatever way that will make it as right as possible with the victim
5. When faced with the opportunity to cause similar harm in the future, make a better choice.

She packages a lot of information there. If you need to print an accountability process onto a business card, this is a great executive summary.

True repentance might include the celebrity who sexually harassed women to not just apologize to same-said women and the larger community, but also provide proactive restitution to their victims. This can include the investment of some of their significant wealth into work protecting victims of assault and harassment or preventing similar harm.

Forgiveness is something that can only be granted by the person who was harmed. In the Jewish tradition, atonement is granted by Yahweh, though for purposes of our discussion we can open the idea of atonement to a larger process of society repair. If the individual harmed is open to an offering of forgiveness, there are ways of giving a true apology that help us deepen our repentance and may give us a path forward in action-oriented atonement.

Rabbi Ruttenberg continues, "In Judaism, you can do tshuvah/repentance work and even get right with God (and be atoned) even if your victim never forgives you." And this is important. In Judaism you ask for forgiveness three times, but you may never be forgiven so the goal must be to align your inner self to your values. That's not a bad idea for all people to practice.

The Jewish tradition also celebrates Yom Kippur, an annual holiday for patching up old disputes, letting go, and forgiving people where you feel old friction. The purpose of Yom Kippur is to think about your actions of the previous year and what you can do better. You fast as you think about time passing, that people die, and that you may have done wrongs that you don't know about. You will approach people that you have harmed with your actions or inactions and seek forgiveness. Honestly, it's also not a bad idea to forgive a few people each year that you were holding onto some old feelings about.

At the suggestion of a friend, I began practicing these traditions. And I came to the painful recognition that I had a pattern of crossing people's boundaries for nearly 30 years. Before I came to understand the emotional needs of others, I hurt the feelings of people close to me in deep, fundamental ways. A common disability with autism is an underdeveloped theory of mind; the ability to understand that others experience things differently than we do. Another common

developmental disability is not recognizing subtle or nonverbal communications; something most people can do from birth.

With these two factors at play, despite my intentions, the impact of my actions were not what I intended. When I looked at my behavior from the perspective of others, I felt like an asshole. Not only had I thought that my intentions mattered more than my impact, I wanted to argue about it. I wanted people to put aside their pain (that I had caused), and recognize where I was coming from.

I had been argumentative, uncooperative, and demanding. It was painful to realize how my actions had hurt others and I cried quite a bit when I began to learn the skills I needed to put myself in someone else's shoes and see how they experienced me. I was confused each time that it happened, and ultimately it hurt me too. I cared about these people and wanted emotional proximity with them but I had no understanding of how to achieve that. Intensive therapy resulted not only in my autism diagnosis, but a better understanding of how it was impacting my relationships, both past and present.

So I began the process of repentance, claiming ownership of my behavior—intentions aside—and recognizing its impact on others. I learned to stop centering *myself*, and to center my relationships. Taking responsibility for the impact of my actions was the first step towards repentance. And committing my life and my work to create transformative solutions for other people who have behaved hurtfully began a process of atonement. I apologized privately and publicly and focused on learning how to prevent it from continuing. I made efforts to be accountable so that I could behave consistently with my own values and be the person that I want to be. And *voila*, the results were astounding. I no longer have the kind of conflict with people that I did for nearly 30 years.

It is important to note that my disabilities can be taken into account without derailing a conversation, and that this acknowledgement allows a collaboration with someone on how to best respect *each other.* It took four years of work to get here and it was not without its false starts. I fell for the trap of fantasizing about my future success, thinking I had already succeeded, and then having to start over several times.

Many people offered me the grace of accepting my apology and allowing me back into their lives, for which I am deeply grateful. Some people weren't ever able to accept my apologies but that's outside of my control and I have to respect that. Changing behavior isn't to "prove" anything to anyone. It's to respect the people in our lives today.

The Failed Apology

In conducting interviews for this book, just about everyone referenced Louis CK, the comedian who was for years followed by rumors of him forcing women to watch him masturbate into office plants. And when #MeToo became a mass movement, the dam broke and the rumors became numerous stories from distressed individuals. Louis apologized but the public was skeptical. Why did his apology include speculating about how the victims felt? Could atonement and repentance have possibly happened that quickly? The resounding reaction was doubt. His audience wasn't ready to trust him yet. The apology didn't resonate as genuine. There was no recognized shift in priorities. Louis' re-entry into the comedy scene bore out the suspicions many people had when an early set featured offensive jokes targeting his critics. Louis's apology failed because, instead of demonstrating reflection for his own failures, maladaptions, and the hurt that he caused, it was full of "observations" that ranged from snarky to mean-spirited to downright cruel. . . many of which related to the behaviors of which he had been accused. It

seemed like he had not sufficiently reflected on his own actions to see how he had caused this pain.

A Better Way

Dan Harmon, creator of *Community,* worked with Megan Ganz, a young writer, on the show. Harmon, in a relationship at the time, admitted to having strong feelings for Ganz, who not only felt uncomfortable about this but confessed to having no sense of whether or not she was actually good at her career or if Harmon's constant praise was just because her boss had the hots for her. When Dan broke up with his live-in girlfriend and professed his love to Ganz, she rejected him. He stopped praising her when she rejected him. Stubbornly not understanding why constant glowing praise was impairing her ability to do her job, Harmon then refused to offer her positive feedback. Not receiving any feedback about her performance similarly did not help Megan's ability to gauge her genuine success at her new career.

On his podcast, Harmon recounts, "The most clinical way I can put it in fessing up to my crimes is that I was attracted to a writer I had power over because I was a showrunner and I knew enough to know that these feelings were bad news." And as the show progresses, you can see the impact of these actions on the writing of the show. The strongest episodes and seasons are with Ganz behind the pen, before she reluctantly leaves one of her favorite shows of all time to write for *Modern Family*, where she hopes to find a boss that's not attracted to her and to figure out if she's actually good at her job or not.

Harmon, pulling few punches, analyzes the situation on his podcast, "in not dealing with my feelings, I made everyone else deal with them, most notably her. . . I lied to myself the entire time about it. And I lost my job. I ruined my show. I betrayed the audience. I destroyed everything and I damaged her internal compass. . . I will

never do it again, but I certainly wouldn't have been able to do it if I had any respect for women. On a fundamental level, I was thinking about them as different creatures. I was thinking about the ones that I liked as having some special role in my life and I did it all by not thinking about it."

Dan's apology is powerful in several ways. Most importantly, six years have passed since he and Megan have spoken, so he's speaking from a place of distanced assessment rather than damage control. This apology was preceded by numerous failed attempts that didn't fully acknowledge his actions or their impact. He realized that admitting to mistakes felt like an attack but that an apology wasn't about defending himself. There was no other outstanding matter to resolve and they didn't have lawyers. He took a risk and exposed himself to liability in the process. He agrees that something *bad* happened. He takes fault for his actions. He knows that admitting his crimes will not be news to Megan and that, ultimately, he's still the one with the power.

Again, the most important thing here is that it shows that Harmon took a good, hard look at himself, found fault, acknowledged it publicly, and made the effort to make change. And perhaps for this reason, Megan Ganz, who listened to the podcast expecting to be upset, was instead able to accept his apology, describing it as "cathartic" and "a master class in apologizing. . . ironic that the one person who could give me that is the one person I would never ask."

Now It's Our Turn: The Three R's of an Apology

A true apology is as rare as unpolluted urban air. I'm not sure if it's always been the case in human history, but *damn,* humans suck at apologizing.

The three most popular apology formats are also deeply shitty:

- the dismiss and move forward ("Stop being upset, you're too sensitive, it was funny!")
- the political no-responsibility apology ("I'm sorry if people were upset")
- the half-assed sorry/not sorry apology. ("I'm sorry I upset you, it was just a joke!")

As a therapist, Faith presumes that apologizing is difficult because true accountability requires a level of vulnerability with which we are deeply uncomfortable, so anyone doing the difficult work of authentic apologizing has our deepest respect. Her model of an authentic apology is a 3-Rs model, meaning **Responsibility**, **Recognition**, and **Repair**. Let us explain what we mean by these terms.

Responsibility is the easy one. It refers to ownership of the harm caused without explanation or equivocation. No "buts," not "I didn't mean it" (I'm gonna presume you didn't mean it, at least the vast majority of the time). Just "I see that my words/actions (or lack thereof) caused pain. Because they were my words/actions (or lack thereof), I am responsible for that pain and I am sorry that I caused it."

The second part is **Recognition**. This is where we open ourselves to a deeper understanding of the harm we caused. Of course, we cannot force someone to hear or accept an apology from us, and we definitely cannot force them to revisit the issue in detail but we can invite them into a dialogue in which we learn more, and grow more as humans. It means asking for a deeper understanding of how something we said/did (or didn't say/do) caused harm, and then shutting-up and committing to listening without intention of response. Recognition helps us be better people because it gives us the context surrounding our harm, allowing us to better generalize the lesson to other aspects

of our lives. Recognition asks "If you are willing to share more about how my actions hurt you, I would like to hear you. I am committed to working on myself as a human being, which means more listening and understanding."

And why? Why would we go that extra step? Because according to relational-cultural theory, that's where the real relationship work happens. Disconnection is an unavoidable part of relationships. Disconnection can lead to further alienation or it can be our opportunity to do the vulnerable work of **repair**. Where a facetious or dismissive apology creates anger and shame, repair creates authenticity, empathy, and growth. Repair isn't only atonement. Acknowledging that you hear and confirm how your actions have affected someone else is repair. Showing someone that you believe their experience is real can help make them whole again.

I Can't Seem to Forgive MYSELF, Though.

Some of the weirdest shit we've seen written about forgiveness has been about self-forgiveness. Shit like *"the most control you have is over yourself so forgiving yourself, making amends, and doing better in the future is way easier than forgiving others!"* We paraphrase of course. We are intentionally not calling out the people who write such silly things, though we suspect that the majority of them are not doing any clinical practice. Because beating ourselves up and being unable to let it go (at least in a healthy way) seems to be the norm for a wide majority. This is likely because forgiveness is a relational process. Meaning at least two people have to be involved, because you are seeking to repair the pain of another.

So if self-forgiveness is structurally impossible (or at least weird and wonky and therefore difficult enough that most people fail at it) then what is the alternative? We've found that most people (and

Faith is absolutely included in this "most people" category) do best with a somewhat structured self-compassion process.

Faith wrote *Self-Compassion: Be Kind to Yourself Instead of Striving for Bullshit "Self-Esteem"* (Microcosm, 2018), including a lot of the research about what makes it effective. If you want to learn more, check it out. But for our purposes here, we turn to associate professor of psychology Kristen Neff. The most important aspect of Neff's self-compasson work is a recognition that this process isn't a "letting oneself off the hook" internal dialogue, but a means of honoring our existence as fallible human beings that are continuously fucking up and trying to do better.

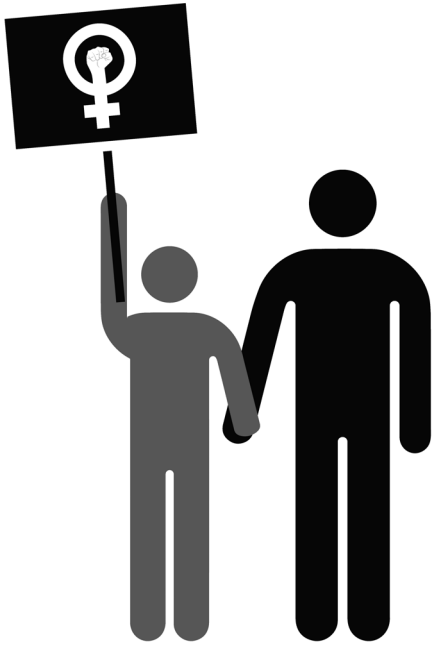
So firstly, let's start with the original three components defined by Neff. They are: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. You will find these three throughout the literature on self-compassion that's out there.

Faith's model of self-compassion is a bit different. Not because Neff's model is wrong, but because Faith's own self-compassion work, and that of her clients, regularly got stuck in the same place. So she added a little something-something to make the process easier to understand and navigate. First, she made it more stepwise (putting mindfulness up top), then she added the concept of self-empathy to the mix. Let's break these concepts down and explore this revised model.

- **Mindfulness**—In this model, *mindfulness* means simply awareness of our current experience. Literally noticing what is going on inside you in the present—all of your thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Without trying to suppress it or control it or judge it. Just saying "Oh hey, there you are." Mindfulness is now on top of the process because you have

to be listening inward to your experience before you can generate compassion for it, right?

- **Self-Empathy**—This term and the definition come from psychologist and mediator Marshall Rosenberg's work on non-violent communication. With mindfulness, we are tuning in to all of our internal experiences. *Self-Empathy,* per Rosenberg, is an inner questioning of the core inner experience to which we are the most attuned.
- **Self-Kindness**—This means being tender with ourselves, rather than shitty and judgmental about our failings. Unlike the practice of loving-kindness, which is a consideration of and tenderness to others, compassionate *self-kindness* is something we do in the presence of pain. And when practicing self-compassion it's self-kindness in the presence of our *own* pain, giving ourselves care and comfort in an active way. If you cut your hand, even doing something dumb, you would go clean it off and bandage it, right? We do this with our physical selves, but rarely with our emotional selves. Self-kindness is the cleaning and caring of the wound so it can heal.
- **Common Humanity**—Recognizing our *common humanity* means simply recognizing "wow yeah, I'm human, and I'm hurting, and other people feel this way too…we're all part of it." It's a realization that I am not alone in my pain and imperfection and do not have to isolate myself in this process. I am experiencing something that all human beings experience because we are all fucking human.



HANDLING CONFLICT

As brain science continues to tell us, we are a species that is hardwired for relationships. We need relationships to survive. But it doesn't mean we always do a good job at maintaining them, which is why we need to learn the skill of accountability in our relationships, personal lives, and professional lives. Some conflict is inevitable simply as a result of wound up feelings, stress, bad days, and unresolved simmering tensions. It's how we acknowledge, address, and resolve these things that makes all of the difference.

Again, your best and primary method for handling conflict is handling your own reactions but, failing that, you will need other strategies when conflict still inevitably arises. Throughout this chapter we have included various frameworks and guides for understanding and handling conflict. The type of skill to employ will depend on the type of relationship. You have different types of relationships with your partner, your friend, your mail carrier, your grocery clerk, your coworkers, etc. Different relationships have various intensities and problems so we have a pretty wide set of tools in this chapter. Some may seem overlapping but that's because there's an incredible level of context here and comprehension can require seeing the same ideas laid out in three or four different ways. If you are a frequent consumer of Faith's other books, you may also recognize some of the exercises in this chapter.

Different proximities of relationships and different desired outcomes require different types of solutions. There are power dynamics and differentials everywhere and you must be mindful of them—especially when conflict rears up. Because ultimately, the person with the most power also has the most responsibility to patch things

up. So if that is you, it's doubly important to listen. And while many have tried, you can't resolve most disputes through subordination. It's winning the battle to lose the war. Really the only time that holding power over someone is an appropriate strategy is when you are dealing with your child, a pet who can't take care of itself, someone who is incapable of making their own choices at this time, or someone that you manage at work—cases where the stated relationship is subordinate, so doing so is likely not manipulation. Conflict mediator Lauren Gross explains

> conflicts can actually be a good way to build a relationship. If needs are met, you both feel heard and you can meet each other where you are at, relationships can actually become stronger through conflict. When the other person digs in their heels, it means that they are committed to their position and often the need to be right. What is that underlying need though? It's really important to figure that out. Once you do, there is a lot more room to be creative in how to meet that need and them to meet yours.

We're going to take a look at methods for resolving conflict with eight different groups of people. In each case, consider the negative impact of the conflict on the other person. Importantly, don't make general complaints based on second hand-feedback. Don't accept other people's gossip as fact until you have first-hand experience and information. Anything else is surrendering control when you can't describe the problem in detail or own the story. Don't be someone's messenger.

- **Stranger**: Disengaging without escalating is your best strategy. You don't know the other person's situation, nor do you need to. This is when someone steals your parking spot or shouts

at you for looking at them wrong. For your purposes, it's best to assume that they are having a bad day and move on. If you must interact, use a civil tone, be honest and respectful, and maintain a presumption of innocence. "I'm sorry. Perhaps you're unaware. I've been waiting for this spot for over 30 minutes." My method for coping with this is writing the encounter into a funny story and venting it to friends.

- **Mail carrier**: There are people like neighbors or grocery clerks that we have no substantive relationship with but encounter in our daily lives. Old resentments can haunt us, so again not escalating and allowing the other person to have their feelings as long as it does not betray our core values or creep into our feelings of safety is best. Let them have their perspective while you have yours.

- **Family**: We're living through an era of history where *Saturday Night Live* offers humor about your racist uncle ruining Thanksgiving dinner. Given the filter bubble and the difficulty to obtain information that contradicts our existing biases, it's important to understand where other people are coming from. Lauren Gross explains

  > I have a friend who told me once, 'Your family knows your buttons because they are the ones that installed them.' Chances are pretty good the same conflicts will come up again and again. More often than not, everyone wants to feel seen, heard, and validated/accepted for who they are. First understand how the other person is best able to hear and understand what they are being told. How do they like to communicate? Then try to clearly communicate what you are needing and work

on authentically listening and validating where they are coming from and work on validating their experience as well as asking for what you need. Non-authentic communication will be detrimental to getting anywhere and may harm the relationship further.

Put yourself in their shoes. Consider the information that they have. Think about what their concerns are. Understanding their thinking is not agreeing with them or abandoning your own values. Instead of making accusations or generalizations about them, you don't need to have an argument. Think about your past investments in each other. If you have a disagreement, often empathizing with the other person can allow them to do the same or at least allow a conversation for two people who have different sources of information. If things get really ugly, do what people who debate Flat Earthers do and talk them back through their logic until you reach common ground. For each conclusion they draw, ask them how they arrived there and allow them to find the gaps in their own logic as they try to explain it to you. This is where assumptions are defeated and people change their minds.

- **Coworker**: There's a stretch of road between where you live and where you work that you encounter coworkers. You are friendly with each other, but you are not friends. Lauren offers,

  What are their preferred communication styles? Do they or their behavior remind you of someone in your family, friends or someone in your past that bother you in some way? Approach with curiosity. Often we work with people that just rub us the wrong way. See

if you can sit with it and get to a deeper understanding of what's really going on for you. Try to understand where they are coming from. If you need them to do something differently, share where you are coming from and why it's important to you and make a clear ask (if possible) on what to do differently.

Some people prefer to keep their distance. Others go out for drinks on Friday. The complication is that conflict you have at work will spill over elsewhere and vice versa. You will likely have very similar or very different experiences, problems, and needs at work and sometimes this strains the bond, as it can feel like denying each other's experience. Choose to make them your friend at work or your coworker. Listen to their experiences but don't let them overwrite your own.

- **Friend**: These are relationships where mutual respect and shared experience brought you together, so these are your best tools for resolving conflict. These are people who trust you and you have chosen each other to be in your lives. They often know things about you that you don't recognize about yourself. Lauren Gross offers,

  Approach it with the assumption that you both want the best for each other. Ask yourself what are their underlying needs? Do they need respect, understanding, for things to feel fair, etc? Ask yourself the same. Be as specific as possible when giving feedback and use examples as well as how it makes you feel. Speak from your own experience rather than putting blame on them or attacking. It always takes two to tangle. Ask yourself what is your role in the conflict? Be transparent

about that. Go into it with intention and be willing to let go of any specific outcome.

People grow apart sometimes but trust and wise compassion can lead back to understanding, or—similarly to family—it can be painful to hold a very different view from someone that you feel very close to. So the most important thing is to listen more than you assert yourself, respect the other person and any power differential (age, experience, income, race, gender, etc) that you have. In *Big Friendship: How We Keep Each Other Close,* Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman discuss talking about the differences in their lived experiences for the first time while writing the book together. For most friends this is subtle or at least below the surface. Faith and I text about our differences all day long and solve any disagreements through humor and chiding each other. The bottom line is that you know your friend so following that impulse will usually help you to empathize with where they are coming from, respect their experience, and make you closer in the end. You don't have to agree on everything but you can understand each other and this will often allow you to reinforce or adapt your own beliefs. People may, at times, misread our tone or facial expressions. With strangers, a simple reply of *"I was doing algebraic equations in my head again!"* is a perfectly acceptable response because you don't really owe everyone your face, right? However with friends, it's more important to explain the issue, mention how it's a particular struggle in specific situations (crowds, noise, or whatever), and invite people to ask *"You doing OK?"* in order to strengthen trust and the relationship.

- **Partner**: We are going to assume that this is someone that you have chosen intentionally as an adult, through noncoercive decision making because you saw something in them that resonated with you. There is a spark that brought you together. As such it can be very difficult when you have even a low-level disagreement about something innocuous, like leaving clothes on the floor. Lauren suggests

  > Recall how much you care about them and want the best for them before entering into the conversation. This really depends on the nature of the conflict and what you're hoping the outcome will be. Often negotiation skills come in handy. Be curious and ask enough questions to understand what they are really needing. Needs are always positive things like respect, security, appreciation, safety, etc. Needs are never for someone else not to do something, like 'don't speak to me this way' or 'stop doing that thing all the time.' Get to the underlying need that you or they want, not what you or they don't want. Once you get to what you both really want, negotiations open up and there is a lot more room for creativity. Talk about what respect looks like to you. Talk about what each of your needs looks like.

  Little things can invoke fear of conflicting values and fear of abandonment. Your partner dismissing a podcast that you suggest might feel like they don't care about bonding when they just don't like podcasts. There are issues and values that are harder to recover from but listening, assuming goodwill, and setting to face every problem, together, as a team, will really help you to feel like you are in a relationship rather

than fighting each other. Treat your partner's needs as vitally important and talk about your conflicts.

- **Subordinate/Child**: Lauren explains,

  > Be aware of power dynamics. You have more power, period. How can you have a conflict conversation and empower them at the same time? What are their preferred communication styles? Do they or their behavior remind you of someone in your family, friends or someone in your past that bother you in some way? How does that change the way you interact with them? Though it can be scary, be willing to be vulnerable. We reach each other through our shared vulnerabilities.

  Since you have the power, these conflicts have the tendency to get the furthest under your skin and to feel unresolvable. The reason for this is that people who have less power push back in any way that they can in order to have some agency in the situation. Begin by seeing the other party as a person, with viewpoints and perspectives as valid as your own. Listen to yourself. When you complain to people you trust most about this conflict or infraction, how do you describe it? Reduce your problem to a single, clear sentence and use that language with your subordinate. Talk about the specific problem you are facing together. Explain in terms of consequences, not threats. Make the discussion into a dialogue, not a lecture. Let them talk and acknowledge what they say.

- **Parent/Boss**: Lauren cautions

  > Be aware of power dynamics. What are both of your preferred communication styles? Do they know yours?

Hopefully you have a relationship built where you feel like you can be yourself. Try to be clear about expectations. Be willing to state what's going on for you and make requests about how you'd like it to go differently. Do they or their behavior remind you of someone in your family, friends or someone in your past that bother you in some way? How does that change the way you interact with them? Approach with curiosity first and get clarity before you dive into details of what's wrong. Oftentimes, a lot can be cleared up with more information.

When we have a conflict with our superiors, we minimize the costs of not speaking up. We ignore the total impact of inaction, finding suffering preferable to what we fear resolution might look like. Are you acting out your concerns instead of talking it out? Our brains envision potential worst outcomes and believe them to be likely. If you care enough to have this difficult conversation, your superior deserves detailed feedback. Start by describing the gap between agreements you've made and what you have observed in practice. Make the other person feel safe by explaining that you respect them and care about their goals. Clarify what you do *not* mean. Express appreciation for their willingness. Face the problem together instead of fighting each other.

It's important to think of relationships not as a binary but as a spectrum. You will have different kinds of relationships and conflicts with different kinds of people. There are things that you would tell your partner but not your mail man or your boss. Sometimes it can feel easier to confide in a stranger, because there is no risk of abandonment and the consequences are fewer. Similarly, there are things that you can

really only trust with your closest friends with whom you have invested the most emotional intimacy and time. This is partially because they understand where you are coming from but also because they have opted into this situation. The people that we are closest to are the ones where we risk the most painful conflict because we are so invested. This is, again, because we feel that we *should* be on the same page about all things so it's painful when we can't understand each other. Your values are the most important thing to consider when you allow new people into your closest sphere of relationships. Conversely, not consciously choosing whom you trust and allow to be close to you is also a choice, albeit one not likely to be in your best interest.

Overall, your best strategy is to be altruistic 96% of the time. Presume best intent. It's you two against the problem, not against each other. Altruism, the selfless concern for others' wellbeing, comes from evolutionary motivations to maintain a cohesive group that can protect itself. Melanie Billings-Yun's *Beyond Dealmaking* suggests that negotiation only works when the outcome remains in everyone's best interest and that the best way forward is "tit-for-tat." If the other party is uncooperative, so are you. If the other party rewards, you reward them as well. It sounds savage but it's essentially setting a boundary that you expect altruism. Mirroring the behavior of the other party is almost always the most beneficial act for everyone. Doing so builds trust and approval. Kindness is rewarded with kindness and standing within the group will improve as a result of it. And frankly, being altruistic is just less exhausting than being constantly distrustful of everything and everyone's motives.

Sometimes ongoing conflict is a source for greater personal reflection. As I came to realize later in life, you shouldn't remain friends with someone just because they are available and willing. I now realize that I shouldn't keep friends in my life that don't take my autism

seriously and endeavor to understand it just like how someone who uses a wheelchair for mobility shouldn't hang out with anyone who demands they just get up and walk. I now only allow friends into my life who take the time to understand my autism and take it seriously. Additionally, as I entered my 40s, I focused on friendships with individuals who were relatively similar in age and/or life experiences, otherwise the power differential was lopsided and possibly harmful to the younger individual. And honestly, it results in far less conflict and much more relating.

Conflict is Not Abuse

City University of New York professor Sarah Schulman released the eagerly awaited *Conflict is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair* (Arsenal Pulp, 2016) during the height of escalating tensions around the #MeToo movement and cancel culture. Schulman, a staunch member of Generation X, like we are, suggests that most people have a difficult time distinguishing between when someone is trying to manipulate or control them and when they feel under attack.

While Schulman is a writer and historian, not a practicing therapist, there is a lot of great information about relational dynamics in her book. As an example, Schulman traces how women's shelters moved from under the supervision of social workers to the domain of law enforcement. She draws some convincing arguments about how this resulted in group shunning, punishment, and isolation from one's community being seen as the best practices for handling perpetrators. This allows abusive personalities to continue to go to any length to avoid looking at the patterns of their own behavior. It also allows the community to ignore gray areas because they don't want or need to participate in negotiation or problem solving. It's easier to just paint

one group as "perpetrators" and one group as "everyone else." This is a complex thesis statement, which is exactly the reason that many people have reported to us that they do not implement her theories within their community organizing groups. But it's also exactly Schulman's point. The world and the social relationships that sustain it *are* complex in a way that deserves more attention.

The problem is that, as professor Theodore Kurd points out, *"the privileged are often good at articulating injury but not always able to identify if they are actually experiencing it. There is a difference in being able to identify the conditions under which injury has or is happening and having lived through it."* This is also the crux of Schulman's argument: privileged people are frequently the ones jumping to declare that a marginalized person abused them because they don't have the tools to recognize what abuse is.

In an interview with LitHub, Schulman explains "there are already thousands of volumes about abuse, and we're currently in a global crisis over the escalation of conflict! We have a president that tells us everyday that he is a victim, that he's under attack. This is a very frequent construction, where the person with the most power sees literal descriptions of their power as an attack. This is pervasive. We're seeing it in white supremacy globally, and we also see it in personal relations. At the same time, we're also seeing people who actually have been abused denied the attention that they need while others use the discourse of 'abuse' to hide their own role in escalating the problem."

Throughout the book, Schulman points out things that any casual twitter user has recognized: humanity concludes quickly that people are selfish or rotten and then acts on that conclusion like it's an indisputable fact. Each time the offense occurs, it's further proof that this person is a villain and their resulting dehumanization is justified.

We don't bother to resolve the conflict because the offender is an abuser and beyond reform. This circular logic ties directly into numerous aspects of the propaganda techniques. It hurts people and it sucks.

Our brains respond this way for all of the reasons that we've outlined in the previous chapters: usually because a conflict has triggered a previous trauma. Sometimes just being activated feels like being triggered and our brain moves into high alert: Flight! Fight! Freeze! We have to practice our CBT skills to get back to our thinking brain.

Instead, start by telling yourself the whole story about what happened. Humanize the situation by asking yourself to list all of the various reasons why a reasonable, rational person would behave the way that the person that you have conflict with did. Employ genuine curiosity. If you're having trouble calming your panic and accessing your thinking brain, do what Navy Seals do: breathe in for four seconds then breathe out for four seconds.

Ask yourself: are you being bullied or are you being disagreed with? Intellectually, we all know someone doesn't have to agree with us, but in the moment, disagreement can feel like being bullied. Is the other person trying to tell you what your experience *should be*? Are they speaking for themselves or for you? Are they stating their opinion or insisting that they know what's best for you?

The exception to the 96% rule is when the other party consistently has shown nefarious motives and has repeatedly demonstrated that you cannot trust them. Just from reading the previous sentence, you know if you have encountered a character like this. If someone has repeatedly shown that you can't trust them, what are you doing in the relationship? If you haven't met someone like this, count your blessings and remember the Lifetime movie that

you saw once about a character like this. If someone *is* holding you hostage and refusing to do things as were agreed, such as threatening you with consequences or enacting systems of control, you need to address this. This kind of interaction makes everyone miserable and turns everything into a power struggle while you feel like a prisoner.

Develop a plan to talk about how the indefensible behavior is out of line. Explain that this is not acceptable and will no longer be tolerated. Explain that your goal is for them to succeed and talk about consequences if this continues. You don't want this to happen but you have to do this in the interest of everyone else involved. Abuse takes place when one individual has power over another, and wields that power in such a way that creates harm. (This is why feminist and relational theorists write so much about power-over versus power-with dynamics). Recognizing how power is being weaponized can help you differentiate between conflict and abuse and help you navigate getting out from under it.

For the most part, working through conflict is not about catastrophizing or assuming that all conflicts are quickly spiraling into the aforementioned prisoner situation (though it's important to know what to look for if they do). Rather, it's about recognizing and quickly de-escalating surface level conflicts as they happen. Let's start with some ways to do this.

Conflict Affects Everyone

A common example of dealing with conflict is cheating on a partner. As a couples therapist, Faith treats infidelity as a form of interpersonal trauma for the partner who was cheated on. (All good therapists steal from other therapists and this approach to working with infidelity was influenced by the trauma-informed work of Barry McCarthy who was

in turn influenced by Snyder, Baucom, and Gordon.) Faith is first and foremost a trauma therapist, and this approach makes intuitive sense to her.

But Faith takes this a step further and presumes the event was *also* traumatic to the partner who cheated.

Yes, we realize that some people are merely acting selfishly with no regard for the feelings of others and no remorse for their behavior. They are mad about getting busted and aren't going to do any work to repair the relationship. If that's the case in your relationship, the hard truth is that you don't have a relationship based on respect for you and your needs. You've been handed an ultimatum and you need to decide whether or not it's one you can live with.

For everyone else? Yes, the person who was cheated on is clearly, unequivocally injured by what happened. *And so is the person who cheated.* They did something that was out of alignment to commitments they made and probably (hopefully) to their personal ethical code. It's a form of moral injury that requires attention and work. When working one-on-one with individuals in affair recovery, Faith has more clients who cheated than who were cheated on. This includes people who were no longer with the partner they cheated on, but they sought out therapy regardless because they wanted to figure out what happened and how to *never* do it again. Because again, we are first and foremost accountable to ourselves and our own values. If you can't repair that partnership, you can still be determined to never hurt anyone else in the same way. We can't even begin to say how impressed we are with the level of emotional maturity that takes. *That* is accountability.

The good news? Research demonstrates that most relationships *do* recover from an affair. The original school of therapeutic thought was that cheating doomed everything and it was time to just begin

negotiating terms of separation with the unhappy couple. Nothing is further from the truth. People fuck up all the time, but if both parties are willing to do the type of work we describe in this book, the relationship isn't necessarily irreparable. That being said, there are definitely certain things that will greatly increase your chances of surviving, repairing, and strengthening your relationship going forward.

Four Levels of Communication

We think of communication as speaking and hearing, when, in fact, it's far more complex and we all have areas in which we struggle and need to be aware. Figuring out where the breakdowns come from the most often is also hugely beneficial. Faith learned this model in a course on Neuro-Linguistic Programming. It has since been lost to the annals of time, so we don't know the actual citation (if you do, write to us!), but we decided that it is too brilliant to keep to ourselves.

The basic idea is that each exchange of verbal dialogue has four levels:

1) *What we mean to say.* You know, the actual idea you are trying to express.
2) *What we actually say.* If you are really good at only saying exactly what you mean at all times, I hope you write a book on your technique. For us regular humans, what we have in our minds and what comes out of our mouths is not always a solid match.
3) *What the other person hears.* Just because you said it doesn't mean they heard it without any filter.
4) *What the other person thinks you mean.* Even if you said "anything for dinner is fine" and you *meant* anything for dinner is fine, your partner may think there is a hidden

agenda, or that other things are going on beyond the words that actually came out of your mouth.

Every couple Faith has worked with who is struggling with a communication breakdown has a problem in at least one of these areas. Generally, we are high achievers and are activating more than one if not all of them. Figuring out where the breakdown is informs the strategies to repair it.

Let's review the often-contentious decision about what to have for dinner:

1) *What you mean to say.* Maybe growing up, you weren't allowed to voice much opinion. Maybe you tend to think your answers are wrong. Maybe you get up in your head about what you want and get paralyzed when trying to communicate. If you don't express yourself well (or aren't great at figuring out what you want), being more measured and considered before responding can make a huge difference. Dinner example? It's okay to say, "Good question, let me think a minute," then actually check in with yourself. Maybe you genuinely *don't* care. Or maybe you really do want pizza and should say that.

2) *What you actually say.* Here is where you gotta use your words. Instead of "[mumble, mumble] like, pizza? Or maybe tacos if that's what you want. Chinese food? Um, there's soup left in the fridge…" say the truth. Like, "I've been jonesing for deep dish all day" or "I had tacos at lunch so anything other than Mexican food sounds good." Clear communication means that the partner-person doesn't have to figure out which answer is the correct one.

3) *What the other person hears.* We all have our own interpretations, filters, and distractions. For this example, let's say partner-

person hears the "I had tacos for lunch" part of your answer but not the "anything other than Mexican food sounds good" part and suggests fajitas for dinner. Do a gentle correction. If it's a continued problem and you are discussing bigger issues than dinner plans, it might help to ask your partner to repeat back in their words what you just told them. As in "I heard you say…"

4) *What your partner thinks you mean.* So many people have had past relationships where all responses were a death trap, they were supposed to mind read and interpret everything that was told to them, and there was hell to pay if they didn't. If you have a partner who over-interprets what you say, they may benefit from a reminder that you are responsible for your responses, and they don't have to mind-read. If you say "anything for dinner is fine" and you really mean "pizza" you better fucking say pizza, or not complain when you get tacos for two meals in a row, right?

Communicating with I Statements

Learning to communicate more assertively and effectively doesn't require a weekend Tony Robbins retreat. It just means considering effective communication as a skill, learning that skill, and practicing until it becomes second nature.

Do you remember the Pythagorean theorem? You totally just recited "a squared plus b squared equals c squared" in your head, didn't you? Did you ever use that outside of school? Faith sure hasn't but I use it every day. Faith believes it would have been more helpful to learn to communicate with "I statements" instead but, don't worry, I will eventually show her the beauty of math.

Try this with your partner when you are all kinds of hacked off (or all kinds of thrilled, for that matter):

I feel

when you .

What I want is .

E.g. "I feel indignant when Faith insults the practicality of the pythagorean theorem. What I want is to show you how useful it is every day."

You know what this is? Being a grown-ass person who takes responsibility for their own feelings and actions and clearly communicates their needs, rather than blaming boo ("You made me mad!") or doing the freeze-out-no-talking thing ("If you really loved me you would just know").

It's gonna feel all kinds of weird and awkward at first. I've had lots of people tell me that they bust out laughing the first few times they try it. It's just so *unnatural*, isn't it? Because we don't encourage people to talk like this, taking accountability and responsibility for their feelings.

But we *should*.

Our feelings are completely our own, and we shouldn't blame others for them. We can, however, ask them for different behaviors that better respect our boundaries. This skill works in regular communication and stays in place even if your convo has leveled up to conflict level. Staying with ownership of your own feelings completely shifts away from the blame game.

You can even take an extra step in acknowledging that they didn't intend the distress you felt, for instance by adding:

I felt uncomfortable when you made that joke just now. I know you just meant it to be funny and thought I would laugh rather than be upset. But I struggle with jokes about that topic. I would really appreciate it if you didn't tell jokes like that around me.

That's awesome shit right there. And bonus points on this, because no one can tell you how to feel if you are already taking ownership of it. It's not right or wrong, it's just what you feel.

Talking Conflict Out in 6 Easy-ish Steps

As is typical for Faith, this conflict resolution structure is a blend of a few other ideas. In this case combining some Brene Brown, professor at University of Houston, with Neurolingustic Programming (NLP) and Non-Violent Communication (NVC) gives you this particular model.

1) **Start with rapport.** This means making a connection with someone else. Some people do this naturally with their nonverbals (leaning forward, head nods, smiling, eye contact). For others it's a skill we have to learn. One of the best ways of building rapport is to match or mirror what the other person is doing (without the harmful expression of emotions that they may be having). For example, a client in Faith's office may be upset and yelling, so she will sit up straighter, lean forward, speak faster, use her hands more as a nonverbal communicator, and firm up her voice. It's matching the intensity of the client's anger and yelling to demonstrate a recognition that this is very important to them and they want to be heard and respected without *angering back*.

2) **Presume Best Intent.** We love how in *Dare To Lead,* Brene Brown talks about presuming that people are doing the best they can. . . and they aren't actively seeking to fuck you over. (Now of course some people are and when that becomes

apparent over time, this doesn't work anymore.) Generally speaking, we may not be doing great, but we really are doing the best we can in a situation. And if we extend that presumption to others, we almost always have a far better outcome. If someone is really activated (yell-y, sobb-y, etc.) this doesn't necessarily mean they are trying to manipulate you into acquiescence, it means they have a core need that isn't being addressed.

3) **What's The Core Need?** When we are talking about core needs, we aren't talking about food, water, shelter. . . but emotional experiences that we code as providing safety and security. These aren't static, but change based on the situation at hand and other elements of our experience. Marshall Rosenberg's work in non-violent communication is founded on the idea of identifying core needs in conflict, to make sure resolution addresses those needs for all involved[4]. When we attend to our core needs as well as to the core needs of the individual with whom we are experiencing conflict, we see the end goal much more clearly.

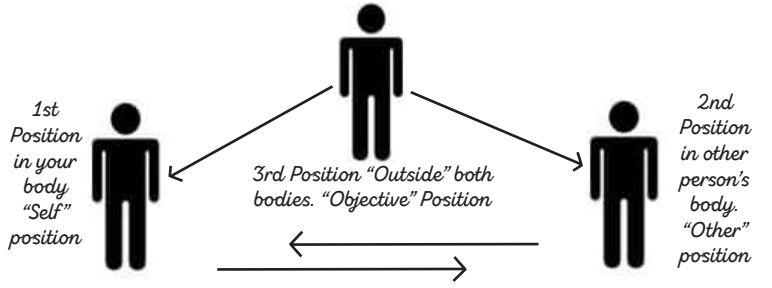
4) **Focus on Outcome.** If we have an agreed upon outcome, it significantly reduces the circuitous conversations that often occur in conflict. This means letting go of past issues and the apportionment of blame in order to resolve the issue at hand. That's a really fancy way of saying rather than fighting to win, we are working to resolve.

5) **Listen actively.** This means listening to understand instead of to respond. We often catch ourselves waiting for the other person to catch their breath so we can launch into our own "Oh, yeah? Well…" instead of making a concerted effort to

4 Marshall Rosenberg's list of core needs can be found at cnvc.org/training/resource/needs-inventory

hear them and demonstrate that you heard them. It can be really helpful to reframe what you heard them just say before you share your perspective.

6) **Use peripheral positioning.** This is an NLP-specific technique that helps us shift perspectives. We start with our own (position one, our personal perspective), then cognitively shift to the other person (position two, their personal perspective), and *then* to the neutral observer (position three, the objective outsider). This allows us not only to empathize with what the other person may be experiencing, but also zoom out from the both of you to consider what someone who didn't know either of you and just walked into the room would suggest about your conflict.


1st Position in your body "Self" position
3rd Position "Outside" both bodies. "Objective" Position
2nd Position in other person's body. "Other" position

BIFF Statements

At this point, you may be thinking that everything above is all well and good but clearly we haven't met your shitty co-worker or your xenophobic stepfather. But we have 100% dealt with one of their dopplegangers out there in the world. When we are dealing with someone committed to misunderstanding us, that's no longer a conversation in which both parties are committed to understanding and agreement.

This doesn't necessarily mean that you're doomed to a brawl, however. The strategies that Faith wrote about in her book *Unfuck Your Boundaries* for dealing with high conflict personalities are really helpful in managing these interactions. Although it's a nice thought to just be able to avoid your co-worker or stepdad, that is usually not possible, so you need to have a good surgical strike ops plan when you can't avoid the encounter all together.

Most of the communication tools in this chapter work in power-with situations where everyone in the conversation has each others' best interests at heart. But there are tons of situations in life where there's a conflict, be it about where to get coffee or how to regulate nukes, and there isn't existing trust in the relationship. Or maybe you're dealing with a high conflict person, someone who is freaking out, or someone who truly doesn't care if there's a mutually beneficial resolution.

A powerful tool for these situations is the BIFF Response—Brief, Informative, Friendly, and Firm—paired with avoiding the 3 As—Advice, Admonishment, and Apologies. These are tools from Bill Eddy's *High Conflict Institute* that Faith teaches regularly. They are great tools for handling conflict and in any situation that is emotionally charged in general.

If you are in the process of establishing and holding better boundaries with someone for the first time, it's going to feel emotionally charged since it's all weird and awkward and new for everyone involved. Having a bit of a recipe will help a ton. Try this one. Add extra garlic if you're feeling sassy.

Brief: Don't give any extra info. Don't over-explain. The more you write or say, the more fodder you are giving the aggrieved party for their battle, yeah? Let's say you got an angry

missive from your boss, accusing you of jacking the keys to the dumpster. Instead of writing an eight-paragraph defense, try a brief, factual response: "I clocked out two hours before closing last Thursday, so I didn't carry out the garbage that day and I never used the keys."

Informative: Don't focus on their incorrect statements, focus on your accurate ones. No sarcasm, no negging, no remarks about the other person's personality, ethical choices, etc. We are looking to end the conflict, not throw down about who the real dumbass in this scenario is. In the same work example, you might add the information, "In order to refresh my memory, I double checked the calendar. I wasn't the person who closed that day, it was Xander."

Friendly: I know, it doesn't seem fair that you have to be nice when someone else is showing their ass. The best way of coming out of the conflict unscathed is to not match hostility with hostility. This doesn't mean fake nicey-nice... just civil. You are far more likely to get a neutral response, if not a positive one. Going back to the work example, you could phrase it as something like "Hi, Sarah! Xander and I did both work last Thursday, but I clocked out early because it was so slow and Xander closed by themself, so I don't know where the keys to the dumpster ended up."

Firm: Be firm without being threatening. Don't make comments that can invite more discussion (e.g., "Let me know if you have any questions" or "I hope you agree that…"). Back to Xander the key-stealer? You could close with "I wish I could be of more help, hopefully Xander will be." Think like Forrest Gump. As in "that's all I have to say about that." If you need to get a decision from someone and can't end

the discussion here, another feature of "firm" is offering two choices so you don't have continued over-discussion. "Would you like to talk to Xander or would you rather I take care of this?"

If you get more communication after you have already BIFFed your response, you can either ignore it or broken-record your BIFF response with the same keywords and even less content until they give up.

Another Bill Eddy trick for BIFF communication is to avoid the three A's: Advice, Admonishments, and Apologies. So let's look at those, as well:

Advice: You don't want to give anyone advice on how to manage themselves or the situation they are ramped up about. They are already hot under the collar so you won't get anywhere. It's hard to hear much when you're upset—that's a pretty universal response. Notice that rather than telling Sarah to check the timecards in our example, we said "I double checked the calendar and confirmed…" That avoided giving her advice on how to do her job. She will realize she should have done so herself once she calms down, so it's all good.

Admonishments: You may want to offer corrective feedback, but just like advice-giving, this isn't the time. The point of a BIFF response is to defuse an emotional conversation and end it for the time being. So avoid anything that makes it sound like you are explaining their behavior to them like they are a naughty child. Again, with Sarah the manager, imagine the continued battle if you had said, "If you had acted like an actual manager, you would have checked the schedule before having a ragefit at me"???

Apologies: Authentic apologies are a good thing. But when everyone is activated, it is not the time for them. Apologizing can give the other person something to blame us for, extending the conversation. "I'm so sorry I don't know what happened to the keys" can let Sarah continue to blame you for her ridiculous insistence that you are somehow responsible. A more gentle "social apology" *can* be helpful to diffuse the issue, if you want to add that to the mix, however. "I'm so sorry you are having to deal with such a frustrating situation with everything else on your plate!" is a show of commiseration and empathy that doesn't connect you to the blame game and doesn't give Sarah any more ammo.

Talking Out Conflict

If there's one definitive thing that we can say about conflict, it's that it's unpredictable and inconsistent. Here are some additional skills, further understanding, and coping strategies for handling various kinds of breakdowns during a conversation about conflict. Much of this applies to people that you are closer to, where emotional proximity is tantamount to the relationship, like a close friend, parent, or partner, but it can also apply to groups where feelings run hot.

In his research about head injury, Dr Paul Echlin discovered that if you don't talk about your feelings, your brain will start to affect your muscle behavior and facial expressions. Despite how hard you try, fake feelings and emotional expression cause the brain to bypass the muscles around the eyes. When you don't express your feelings, it shows in your face as insincerity. This shows just how important it is to honor what we are feeling and talk about it with people that are important to us.

It's deeply unfair to ascribe your own meaning to things when you don't really know what the other person is thinking or feeling. Would you like someone to make those assumptions about your thoughts and feelings? When we talk about accountability in the context of conflict, it's holding people accountable to prior agreements and group boundaries, not to your own value system.

When you find yourself holding malice or resentment, you need to talk about it. "I'd like to talk to you about what just happened," is a good icebreaker. If the other party isn't engaging in the conversation, there is a reason. When you are dominating the conversation on a subject of conflict, acknowledge any complaint the quieter party has. Ask why they aren't talking. Usually this means that they feel outgunned through guilt tripping, or being silenced, hounded, or dominated until they succumb. This may be because of how they were treated in previous relationships and conflict brings them back to that place. Acknowledging this creates safety. Give a chance for them to explain why it feels unsafe.

Schulman points out that email and text are poor formats for having accountability conversations because information only moves in one direction at a time. It's by definition, not a *conversation* because you cannot listen and react, which is much of conversation. If you find yourself ending up in an accountability conversation over text, hit pause, and ask if you can resume talking about it later in person or at least on the phone.

In *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High,* one of the best books we found on accountability, Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler created a solution to help start a conversation, called Ask Mirror Paraphrase Prime (AMPP).

- **Ask**: when there is conflict, inquire with the other person about what they think is happening.
- **Mirror**: describe what you perceive to be their emotions. E.g. "You seem upset."
- **Paraphrase**: repeat what they say back to them in your own words to demonstrate comprehension. "It would be really frustrating to find out that we're going to see a movie when you believed we were going to the zoo."
- **Prime**: offer your best guess about how you believe that they perceive the larger issue and encourage them to speak more about the situation.

This is a good method to show that you are comfortable talking openly about the situation. Acknowledge that everyone wants to feel respected and included but doesn't always feel listened to.

Alternately, if the other person is overbearing in the conversation, reverse the dynamic with lines like "Oh! That's not been my experience, tell me about yours?" This shows that you aren't willing to absorb their experiences as your own but you are willing to talk about it.

According to *Crucial Conversations*, people have six sources of influence: personal motivation, personal ability, social/group motivation, personal influence, structural and environmental motivation, and reward motivation. By looking at these motivations, you can align your goals to others so everyone is rewarded.

If the person escalates, there is a good reason. Escalation is a distraction from the issue at hand because the person acting out doesn't have support or tools to address the underlying issue. If someone is angry, it's because they had a core value violated. Before they solve

their issues, they want to talk about them, but may not know how. Accommodate this in order to repair the relationship. If the other person is angry, retrace their path to action. When you reveal aspects of our shame or trauma to someone that you trust, you are testing to see what happens when you tell the truth and if you'll be rejected. If this new information elevates the relationship, the mutual understanding and this shared experience can become a recognized aspect of the relationship but can also be projected onto the person that you've trusted it with.

Often during an accountability conversation, another accountability issue will be brought up. Usually you'll want to focus on the most important conversation. Usually that's the prior topic that sparked the conversation. But sometimes new information will be revealed that will change what the most important conversation is.

If the other person feels unsafe, they may move to threats or violence. Back up and establish trust. Recognize the difference between anger and violence directed to control you. A person has a right to feel angry. They do not have a right to direct violence at you for any reason, even if you've allowed it in the past. Ask for permission to talk about root causes so that they can consent to these conversations. Withholding communication makes repair impossible and does not allow learning problem solving. Refusing to have a conversation with someone close to you can create long term damage.

Acknowledge your needs rather than solutions or positions. Speaking from a place of assumed authority and offering your idea first biases the other person's response. Don't fill their head with your ideas. Doing so stifles their creativity and thought. Give them the means and motivation to enact their own solution. You want to encourage their ideas and best thinking, but also let them feel ownership of the solution

that you created together. They might have a better idea than you. In turn you will solve problems, learn something, and spread compassion.

The Opposite of Cancel Culture: Inviting In Versus Calling Out

There's no denying that conflict can be difficult and painful. And while that's no reason to take the easy road out, we can see why people do. Though it would certainly be nice if there was an agreed upon road forward as a society for bringing people into our groups and communities and their values.

Organizations seeking systemic change have struggled with just this topic across time: how do we handle problematic histories where repair has not been made? What do we *do* with that information? For example, how do we handle the aforementioned situation in which individuals call Microcosm offices to let us know that one of a dozen different authors or artists that we publish or sell in our store has a history (and perhaps a present) that we should be aware of.

Sara Marcus, in her book *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, discusses how these issues were brought to the table in riot grrrl meetings. If a band member assaulted someone, does the entirety of the group refuse to purchase the band's music? See their shows? What about shows where they are playing with other bands? What about other bands that play with them sometimes? Do they tell others about the collective strike and expect them to stop supporting the band as well? How much is enough and what is too much? How is this reaction influenced by this issue not being taken seriously or resolved for literally thousands of years?

For some, the problem in these situations is that there is no public record of legal action. We only have the truths we speak.

Survivors are not motivated to call the cops or utilize a justice system that they view as corrupt and that has an abhorrent record in dealing with assault. My friend is an attorney for the state whose job involves supporting women after an assault. She says that she usually doesn't even bother working with the police because they are so unhelpful and most of the repair is done by social workers. Given the trauma involved in revisiting violence, it's understandable that the social dynamic becomes based in quiet rumors. The riot grrrl founders felt that they had to support each other after years of having punk rock rules dictated to them by boys.

Much has been written to tear down riot grrrl as a social movement because of some of the stances that members of different groups have taken. It's an easy target; however, we have no interest in dragging out decades old decisions to criticize. Riot grrrl *was* a groundbreaking, innovative movement at a challenging time when there wasn't a better blueprint. Innovators aren't going to do everything perfectly on the first try. This is why science is peer reviewed—it evaluates all of the data and refines the process towards the intended goals. But social sciences tend to involve our emotions more than what's under our microscopes.

A somewhat encouraging detail is that after the riot grrrl movement folded in on itself, in case after case where person after person was ostracized, involved parties would warn that they didn't consider ostracization as best practice...they just didn't know what else to do. Which is entirely fair, seeing that despite the fact that a substantial amount of criticism, deconstruction, and debate about these processes has been offered up, there hasn't been much proposed in the way of a healthy alternative.

Then, in the summer of 2016, Megan Petrucelli got in touch about taking her students on a tour of Microcosm. After talking to

her, I stumbled across her article "Beyond Absolutes: Justice for All." It outlines many of the things that I'd been feeling and starting to express over the past six years. Leftists like to create our own systems for doing things and are understandingly distrustful of more established systems of control and domination. Petrucelli points out that leftists' behavior of ostracizing people who they consider to be "others," or who they can paint as not maintaining their same value systems, runs counter to egalitarianism. This behavior, Petrucelli argues, gives little thought to the root causes of behavior or even understanding the behaviors in question as an attempt to fulfill unmet needs. She writes

> "When it is suggested that we take the needs of abusers into account or begin to tease apart what causes a person to become an abuser, the conversation can quickly devolve into name calling ("rape apologist") or dismissal ("It doesn't matter *why*, only that the abuse occurred"). We mistake vengeance for justice without acknowledging that vengeance itself is a form of oppression. A culture of fear is created, fear that if we say what we believe or question how to respond most effectively we will be seen as aligned with the wrong person, fear that we will be ostracized by our communities, fear that we are not representing our beliefs and values with the same passion that we feel in our hearts. This fear becomes a divisive fissure that negatively impacts movements and drives communities apart. Furthermore, the needs of the person directly affected by the abuse are often ignored or diminished as the punishment of the perpetrator becomes spotlighted."

These words are powerful because they speak to the concern of restoring justice and eradicating abusive behavior rather than just pushing someone out of our social bubbles, often to repeat the behavior elsewhere. Everyone in social movements throwing around the word

"accountability" seemed to be using some narrow connotation to actually mean ostracize, since leading someone toward accountable behavior never seemed to enter the picture. And worse, every accountability process that we've ever watched was like a car that slowly ran out of gas; eventually it came to a stop at a randomly unhelpful point along the roadside. Ostracizing someone from a community does nothing to resolve the problem at hand, though we can understand how it feels rewarding. Hell, I have done it to others plenty of times. It feels good, like something is being achieved. But it's winning the battle to lose the war.

As Petrucelli says "We are loath to imagine that there is any aspect of ourselves that may also be oppressive; that when our feelings overwhelm us we also lash out in abusive ways. Instead, we push perpetrators away and other them as 'criminals' to separate ourselves from their behaviors. In this way, we feel justified for maintaining and acting out the systems of oppression we otherwise reject."

Let's take a look at some healthier ways to resolve conflict as a society.

Community Accountability

The idea that groups collectively hold cultural norms that all members are individually committed to upholding makes sense. When it doesn't happen, everyone comes together to discuss the transgression and determine if repairs can be made. In *reality,* due to a lack of structure and standards, these processes don't result in healing or growth. When they inevitably and consistently fail, blame is put on the perpetrator rather than on the group or process. The "perpetrator" goes elsewhere and falls down a spiral of shame, sees themselves as having less worth, and lowers their expectations of their own behavior.

In the middle of editing this book, Faith witnessed a social media "call in" that managed to navigate that difficult space of a public warning without violating privacy or shaming. Faith asked permission to share the story because she knows we've all faced times where a direct confrontation is ignored while concerning behavior is happening. The individual agreed (obviously...cuz consent is always important).

The person in question is a member of a tight knit recovery community and posted online that they had concerns about "fundraising efforts" that were done in the name of BLM. After noticing that donations had been sent to an individual's personal PayPal account, they directly questioned the individual about which organization was receiving the money. After multiple ignored attempts of trying to get clarification, they made a post about it to their friends.

Their public posting did not name the individual but asked if anyone else had been approached for a fundraising effort and had more information about how the money was being spent. They stated concerns and hoped they would be addressed. They added that if the individual was financially hurting and needed personal assistance, they

understood and respected that, having been there in the past. They stated they had no problem assisting someone individually but didn't like the subterfuge of movement fundraising.They concluded that if anyone else had information or thought they may have been likewise convinced to donate, they could reach out to her through DM, but to not publically name the individual involved. This allowed community members warning of financial mismanagement without public shaming or cancellation and we are so grateful for how gently they handled a tough situation.

As of publication time, the situation is still playing out. No one is going to give the individual more money, and there is a clear expectation of accountability work to rebuild trust in the community. Strategies have been put in place to prevent others from losing money or being hoodwinked by falsehoods. But the person in question has not been ostracized from a recovery community that is vital to the sobriety of all the members. And the door is open for repair whenever the individual is ready to step through.

This is a good example of a group holding boundaries and behavioral standards without castigating or ostracizing someone. Holding a boundary consists of a designated group member saying "My friend...your behaviors are not acceptable in this environment. We hope you feel that working through what led you to these behaviors is something that makes sense for you. And if you want to continue to be involved here, we'd love to discuss your process and whether or not that can happen. Until then, we need you to no longer be part of certain group events and operations."

Conversations of this nature include the unacceptable behaviors and are expressed in a judgement-free and attribution-free manner. As in:

> "This is a straight-edge meeting space. In the past three weeks, you have come in on two different occasions stumbling and other group members smelled alcohol on you. When Marisol asked you to leave for the evening, stating that you appeared to be altered, she reported that you yelled at her and called her a 'controlling bitch.'"

Notice how there was not even any discussion about whether or not they were drunk? Or that they were angry at and verbally combative with Marisol? That's what we mean by judgement-free. Very behaviorally specific. You were stumbling and smelled of alcohol. It is fact-focused. Others relayed that you yelled and used these words while doing so. The attribution-free part is also implied within the dialogue. No one says you're an abusive asshole or a shitty person or that you are drinking because you have no self-control. The reason for your behavior is not the group's concern. That has to be part of the self-accountability process.

As we mentioned previously, one of the most toxic aspects of the old model of social ostracism is that it relied upon out of control rumors that weren't accountable (ahem) to facts, or anything. Dictating the terms of the situation about a static state of someone else's character spells trouble in several ways. First, it creates the construction that someone who did "bad things" is defined by their worst moment. They are a "bad person." Second, since there is no scientific process involved, any effort to clarify or seek information is inherently viewed as doubting the survivor. So you can't ask questions without also becoming a *bad person*. Third, it tells the listener that their own senses and experiences with this person aren't important or valid; only the speaker's are. It denies other perspectives to paint a black and white picture. And as we spelled out in a previous chapter, it allows no space for someone's personal growth and forces them into a spiral of shame,

which often results in *worse* behavior as they see themselves as a lesser person. It's a downright unconstructive politick that exploits every aspect of propaganda.

In a world of memes and fake news, separating the behavior from the person is more vital than ever. In the quest for quick sound bites we simplify, misconstrue, misinterpret, and vilify people because we are human and sometimes our filters fail us. Perhaps more importantly, people *can* overcome their struggles and change. If we are going to support the people brave enough to make public accusations, we need a functional system to ensure that people are safer because behavior changes. If we are going to create something better than the criminal justice system for righting wrongs, our system has to truly be ***better***.

So what is constructive? Obviously, you can and *should* talk about people who have harmed you or even people that you don't think have the best interests of something at heart. Your concern is valid. Even if they aren't temperamentally toxic, they might simply not be a good fit for an opportunity or organization. Just consider the responsibility and impact of your actions. You don't have to catastrophize, omit details, or exaggerate through a game of telephone to state your concerns. So what's a better way to share information about someone that you are concerned about?

Stick to the facts and how your opinions lean on them. Faith tends to speak fairly generally but very firmly. For example, if speaking about a problematic organization, she may say "There are many good people there, I think the organization as a whole is in a rebuilding phase, but I have hopes that they will come out strong in the future." If it is an individual person, Faith may respond with "That's not someone I spend time with" or "I wouldn't consider them a good fit for this project/event/etc." When it's professional a simple "They're not on my referral

list" is generally more than enough information for the asker. (Faith promises you if someone asks "What do you think of Dr. XYZer?" and she responds with "They are not on my referral list," the point is *made*.)

If there is a situation where more information is necessary, she only offers publically available facts, and doesn't share gossip as a general rule. Because even publicly available information may only be accusations, she will note that as well. As in "They stepped down from that position after multiple accusations were made public by former students" factually relays information without supposition and respects the other party sufficiently to make the decision that is right for them.

These may seem likely deliberately vague responses and yes they are politick and legally very safe, but they are also trustworthy. She is speaking to her experience of someone or a group of someones (either known directly or through publicly traded information) without being dickish with a bunch of dirty details.

I lack tact and can be a bit more blunt, such as "I went to that conference and it's the opposite of forward thinking. Who is running that thing? The board seems to be in turmoil." Statements like that have a way of getting in the ear of people and hurting their feelings, which isn't my intent. So that's part of my current growth project: how to offer an opinion about people that I have concerns about but also want to heal instead of tear down.

A few years ago I was invited to speak on a panel at a public library. It felt like an awesome way to connect topics like publishing, zines, and autism awareness. The email explained "Our goal is to bring together a wide range of experiences within the zine-making community to explain their significance both in regards to self-publishing but especially as a tool for empowering marginalized voices." I was overjoyed. As an autistic person, even though you represent less

than 2% of the population, it is rare that someone thinks of you as a "marginalized voice."

Two weeks later, after the program was made, I received another email "Unfortunately, after discussing the panel and overall direction of the zine fair with my co-organizers, we've decided to recenter this event with a focus exclusively on POC and women voices."

I responded: "Sure, I understand. Oddly, this same thing has happened five other times in the past three years where my invitation is rescinded and I am replaced by a neurotypical, able-bodied person on a panel of people that all identify this way. I understand the challenges implicit in organizing these events but for the sake of framing the empowerment of marginalized voices, please try to include disabled and autistic people in your programming as well. They are perspectives that are all-too-often ignored and erased."

I regretted this response immediately but reading it again now, it seems reasonable and says what was intended without being mean-spirited or harsh. It's making a political statement. Autism is represented by the voices of parents and the experiences of "experts." It's rare that autistic people are asked to talk about any subject through the lens of autism.

Microcosm recently hired a new manager who was hurt by some things that I said about an organization that she was the director of many years ago. While my comments were about a time long after her tenure, it still pushes her and I apart. However, her involvement with Microcosm has built a bridge wherein the organization she once ran can revisit my feedback. By dialoguing instead of casting generalizations, everyone gets what they want. New manager gets the publisher of this book involved in an organization that she holds dear, the organization can rebuild shrinking membership, and I get to advise one more publishing organization on being groundbreaking.

A friend approached me recently because a leader of a long-standing community bike ride was accused of pressuring numerous event attendees into getting drunk and sleeping with him. It's an age old story. Several women were discussing how to deal with it. Should they kick him out? Some were already making public posts making accusations. Usually, the argument behind public call-outs and shunning is that these measures keep women safe. But do you think his behavior will cease or expand if he's pushed out of the group? Are we only concerned about people within our groups, or all women?

Together, my friend and I created enforceable guidelines to prevent the sexual pressure and to appease people demanding shunning. The organization printed consent rules in its guides, with clear consequences for violating them. They enacted a buddy system for people to look out for each other and talk about shared experiences, hopes, and expectations. This way the issue is not about putting one person on trial (that's not the job of a bike ride, nor something they have the skills to perform) but we can prevent his behavior *and* the behavior of other people like him. He doesn't get to debate his way out of what he did or why it's okay. The statement and boundaries are clear. It's similar to the person shouting in the meeting and smelling of alcohol; you can't legislate respect or accountability. You have to ask for it (and a breakout group from the ride did discuss the impact of his actions with him, including suggestions for how he could restore their trust).

In short, it worked because it separated one person's behavior from the boundaries of the group and treated each as separate issues. The weakness that was being exploited was strengthened. When I think of bureaucratic solutions to problems like this, I put myself in each person's shoes and see if I could live with myself in the new arrangement. The leader isn't *entitled* to sleep with attendees. He

doesn't have to attend the bike ride. If going on the bike ride without pressuring sex isn't appealing, well, then those actions may be rather revealing.

The WTF (Women Trans Femme) Bikexplorers, a cycletouring and camping group, created a pledge to make the cycling industry more responsible for making workplaces, communities, and the world genuinely inclusive. Their pledge is guided by ten principles:

1. Trust Intent, Acknowledge Impact
2. Respect Indigenous Stewardship of Land
3. Practice Consent
4. Honor Language an Individual Choices for Themselves
5. Don't Assume, Let People Share, Or Ask When Appropriate
6. Avoid Harmful Language
7. Do Not Shame
8. Work Towards Collective Understanding
9. Recognize Wholeness
10. Make Space and Step Back

This list is powerful because it's filling in many of the gaps that riot grrrl set out to address more than 25 years ago. And it's remarkably substantive. Probing it with my best critical thinking skills, I can't find a way for people to weaponize it to harm people. The list is addressing many years of experiences and social justice movements and creating actionable frameworks and perspectives to respect each other.

In another case, a nonprofit old enough to have children had been shedding members for years. What began with dozens of invested participants had shriveled into three people, only one of which

controlled all of the money. Over the years the organization had become flush with cash without any expenses. A woman of color moved to town and got involved enthusiastically, finding that the organization was entirely white people with upper middle class incomes much greater than her own unemployment check. The group attempted to shun her after she attempted to create a job opportunity for herself and sent scathing emails to a public list. I witnessed the resulting spate of ugly messages, complete with public accusations and name calling. I remembered my own negative experiences seventeen years prior with the same organization, offered my services, met with each person alone, took copious notes, cross-interviewed everyone about the kernel of truth that others had said, and made a proposal that met everyone's needs.

It turns out that the treasurer had wanted to leave for years but was afraid that doing so would destroy the organization. Others were frustrated about how the once-democratic organization had become more and more authoritarian and walked away. The organization planned a series of public meetings and restructured. The woman that sparked the conversation didn't end up getting reinvolved which sucks, but the organization at least ended years of stagnancy for the good of the broader community. Listening objectively to the facts and stripping out the emotions made it easier to deal with the substance of the problems and create solutions that were agreeable. Because everyone had problems and concerns. And none of them were actually in conflict. The organization set institutional boundaries and values that they were previously lacking or different for different members. Making them explicit creates a framework to be accountable to.

What if the conflict is playing out, right now, in your very organization? What if deep-seated, years-old tensions are simmering and you haven't already established the boundaries around them? What

if two people that are both essential to an organization and have to work together push each other's buttons and each attempt to convince the rest of the network that the other is a "bad person?"

It's likely that you have some dusty bylaws and guidelines that speak to this situation, but it's been years since they've been enforced, if they ever have. What do you do?

You begin by talking privately to each of the people involved in the conflict. If you assume they have bad intentions and you have moral superiority, any accountability conversation will fail. While a good excuse does not replace accountability, placing blame is the refusal to understand another person's decision making process. There was a reason that they did what they did, no matter how illogical it might seem to you. There was something that they were trying to accomplish, even if it was borne of some maladaptive coping mechanism from their childhood. Could the same criticism not be made about yourself?

A sample script to get started is "It's no secret that you and X aren't getting along. I was hoping that you might share your perspective and experiences so that we can try and resolve it. It's been going on too long and I think that resolution would be to everyone's benefit."

The key points here are that you aren't placing blame. You are looking at the facts and an objective language. You are respecting the experience of everyone involved, even if one person is creating the bulk of the problems. Avoid authoritarianism, focus on the rewards and benefits for each person and the group, and show how performing the desired behavior makes you part of the group.

Back to Marisol and you at the straight-edge meeting space. Maybe you were drunk and yelly. Or maybe you had accidently doubled your medications that day and were stumbly, plus forgot your hearing aids so were unintentionally loud. Or maybe none of these things are

true and Marisol had threatened the week before to get you kicked out because you had recently broken up with her favorite cousin. It's entirely possible that all of these other alternative explanations would come to light if you were approached with accusation and vitriol. However, these methods are more likely to cause harm than repair it.

Some leaders just sit down their entire group and try to have a conversation about the issue. It seems like a more efficient use of time. The reason that this doesn't work is that most people aren't inclined to publically air the grievances or even speak up. The prevailing group psychology here is that people are more inclined to agree with their peers than state their true feelings. On the whole, people are more afraid of being ostracized than they are of continuing to suffer a bad situation. So resolution is unproductive as a group conversation. Instead, you have to talk to each stakeholder individually about their observations, thoughts, and feelings. What concerns them? What have they witnessed? What are their biggest fears? What do they think would help? Listen, record, and try to assure them as best you can that healing the conflict is in the best interest of the organization. Use their brainstorm to help them feel invested in the outcome, and thus the group.

Next, you have to set better organizational boundaries moving forward. If one person is consistently breaking rules and nobody has said anything, that's the organization's fault as much as the person's. If you are going to start enforcing agreements, you have to give people fair warning or it will feel unfair or smug. Then be consistent and set expectations to accommodate people with different views. "This is going to seem silly to you but it's important to other people that you care about," or "I'm going to ask you to do something that other people don't think is necessary."

Breaking a promise is a huge violation of trust and the relationship, but it's not always clear cut. Microcosm used to have problems at work with the day shift staying hours too late and being in the way of the night shift. Nobody had brought the problem to my attention even though it had been going on for years. People were trying to be "nice" but one person seemed to be weaponizing this behavior to try and get rid of a coworker that she didn't like. When I asked her about it, she was defensive and said that we should be thankful that she worked so hard. I explained that the impact of her actions were hurting three people who couldn't do their jobs until she got out of their way. Years later the "day shift out of the building by 6 PM" policy is a remnant of one bad actor's behavior and everyone else's quest to regain the trust of the night shift by respecting their hard work.

People who are scapegoated cannot be forced to stand alone. I listened to the chief policy breaker at length and cross-referenced her story against others. I supported her and reviewed the allegations about others' misbehavior. Another woman *had* antagonized her by slamming a door angrily. I handled this as a separate incident. In both of their cases, agreements had been broken. However, when the day shifter demanded reparations in the form of working from home, buying her a new laptop, and paying for her Internet service, we declined. She had created this problem equally with others. Rewarding her in the requested way was not an appropriate resolution.

Instead of scapegoating, community members need to remove themselves from their corners and move towards negotiating. We have found that establishing circumstantial facts around the conflict is a remarkably effective tool for this. It's difficult to argue that someone should be fired once you learn that they weren't in the building when someone else slammed the door. The person who slammed the door apologized, hasn't done it again, and agreed to bring further conflicts

to her manager. The person who chronically stayed late quit in a huff when it was clear that the boundaries were firm.

Groups have a way of factionalizing and splitting into smaller and smaller subgroups, making trust difficult as they demonize outsiders. So after this incident, I met with each person on staff and offered to talk about it. Really, I was offering to actively listen to their concerns.

To work through a disagreement in community:

- Focus on specific maladaptive behaviors, not labels or summaries. If need be, create a long list. Try to be as specific as possible. Use "Has a habit of slamming doors around me and scowling" instead of "Is a really evil and disgusting person." The former is useful. The latter is not.
- Don't bring up every possible vague accusation unless it's relevant and actionable.
- Create a specific schedule to get specific items done, with short, medium, and long term deadlines. Make sure that someone is willing and able to oversee those deadlines.
- If things are very tense, assign an advocate to each party who can double as a less emotional point of contact for information in both directions.
- Line out a sequential action plan to solve the problem. Make each step substantive but incremental and achievable.
- Establish boundaries as a clear if/then. There is no motivation for someone to cooperate with you or remain if you are shaming them or treating them miserably already.
- Acknowledge when a specific request is completed. If it is instead ignored, this becomes a point of fact. "We explained

that you needed to move your desk by Friday and it's now Monday."

I met some young people at my favorite tea shop who heavily endorsed the Creative Interventions Toolkit[5]. It's 576 pages of encyclopedic knowledge created with Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, based on their combined years of trying to address interpersonal violence. It urges the reader to recognize state violence alongside personal violence. At nearly 600 pages, I found it too cumbersome and academic to be as action-oriented as I would like, but if you want to establish a strong, leftist foundational frame from which to begin approaching interpersonal violence, it's a one-stop shop that might suit your purposes.

Slowly, with the proper tools, we can face problems together as a group and work together to create change. Maybe not everyone will stick around, but that's okay too. Though it is important to make sure that you aren't consistently pushing out the most marginalized people, because that points to a different failure on your part. Are you upholding the values of a member's rights to acts of injustice, such as homophobia or ableism? Sometimes, the group's boundary has to be in preventing members from inappropriately persecuting other members that they don't get along with.

As you become skilled at observing conflict within your group, prioritize dealing with it sooner. You'll find that viewpoints are not nearly as entrenched and it's easier for people to hear viewpoints besides their own.

Resolution

We're almost done but first, we really need to do a deep dive on how to align your behavior to your values since that is both the core of this

5 https://www.creative-interventions.org/tools/toolkit/

book and the aspect of accountability that most people struggle with. It's easy to see how you betrayed yourself after the fact but it's harder to see that as your first action in the moment of truth.

On her podcast *Sagittarian Matters*, Nicole Georges interviewed Jibz Cameron about a conflict. Georges had recently gone viral when she was filmed shouting at a group of unmasked strangers during the height of COVID viral contagion and this story was featured in the *Washington Post*. Having misgivings about becoming famous for her personal expression instead of decades of stupendous creative work, Nicole stood by her feelings while questioning how clearly she communicated them. Similarly, in an affluent suburb of Los Angeles, a jogger became upset with Jibz and her sister for not walking on the far right-hand side of the path. When conflict escalated, Jibz got snarky, and the jogger responded in kind, at one point referring to Jibz and her sister as lesbians as an "insult." Both parties appeared to feel that they knew the "right" way to utilize public space and believed that the other was wrong.

Weeks after the incident, Jibz was still focused on what the "right" thing to do was; how to "win" this interaction with a stranger. Our brains think that if we just deploy the right set of sick burns that we'll show the other party how our value system is superior. But usually we just end up regretting these actions. We need to be accountable for how we interact with those around us.

These aren't great crimes. And that's why they are good examples. We all enact small betrayals of our value systems every day. My most central value is not telling other people what's best for them or what they should do. And yet I find myself doing this in small ways every day, since I manage people at work and have a lot of knowledge about conversational topics. I wouldn't put a sticker like "stop going to homophobic churches" on my bike while something stating a fact feels

in line with my values. There's a line to walk here, for sure, between projecting my values and what I believe in while holding onto the idea that these values are only best *for me*, not for someone else. Naturally, this value formed from screwing this up a multitude of times over decades and gets complicated when people *do* ask my opinion.

And not telling other people what's best for them carries into subtler areas as well. Some people are very sensitive about being given advice and tend to read into our subtext. Remember the four levels of communication (page 135)? Even if I get good at saying what I mean, it doesn't shield me from rubbing people the wrong way or coming across as "having a tone." People often tell me that I'm annoyed when I'm merely trying to be specific in making my point. Sure, I could be annoyed that people think I'm annoyed, or I could accept that their feedback is valuable.

I once listened to myself talking to my partner on video and was horrified at how condescending I came across. I was snippy and dismissive and not at all how I imagine myself in my head. Fortunately, this wasn't an "oh well, I guess I'm just that way, my partner knows what I meant" dismissive moment. It was my moment to review that tape and think about how I wanted to express myself and how to align those values to actions. I had a compassionate, introspective talk with myself.

If I even think that I might have hurt someone's feelings, I apologize. Usually the other party dismisses my apology as unnecessary, but I know that they might still appreciate it. Faith does the same thing, and when people say "Oh, no...it's ok" she responds with some variation of "It's kind of you to say so, but it wasn't ok and you are owed my apology." It serves not just the relationship, but her personal accountability work.

Above all you need to remember, that the most important thing about accountability is keeping your actions in line with your values. So hearing feedback, recognizing our missteps, and being willing to accept that our actions do not always have the intended impact can lead us to soul searching or, to borrow again from the Jewish faith, atonement.

Atonement, the actions we take beyond an apology to create healing, is essential. It reminds us of who we are and how that carries forward into our lives. In the podcast interview, Jibz wasn't worried about apologizing to this jogger, a stranger from a wealthy suburb. She was concerned with realigning her value system. She thinks people should respect each other and that homophobia is unacceptable, but that an observer might feel that Jibz's actions were just as upsetting as the jogger's.

For most people, this is merely recognizing our mistakes and pledging not to repeat them. However, if the problem is recurring, it points to a deeper problem. And atonement becomes even more essential. If you find that you're slipping, perhaps it's a good time to revisit the accountability questionnaire (page 99). But usually, realigning your values to your actions will result in screwing up less while practicing greater atonement.

How do you perform atonement? First, you need to perform an "examination of conscience," thinking about what you did wrong and how to resolve it within yourself. Part of this is feeling genuine regret about what you did. You have to power through all of your own cognitive distortions and the things that others did "wrong" that might allow you to feel justified. There's no point in lying to yourself; you'll merely defeat your own chances of success.

If you're getting stuck, seek wise compassion from a friend. What have they observed? When I was having a lot of trouble aligning

who I was with who I thought I was, I called my first long term partner. It had been over a decade since we had split up and we lived thousands of miles apart, so I hoped that she wouldn't just drown me in idiot compassion but would answer my questions honestly.

We talked for an hour and I asked about her experiences in the relationship. She said that while she had learned and grown a lot from our time together and was thankful for it, I was often exhausting. She didn't feel like I steamrolled her boundaries, manipulated her, attempted to control her, or abused her—but I made my needs, wants, and desires known, which might feel like pressure to some people. But more importantly, she explained I often came across as obtuse when she tried to explain her own needs and wants to me. This was really helpful information.

The most important part of seeking this information is taking hurtful things that people say about you and turning them into a kernel of truth—a starting point—as a way to build your behavior in the direction that you desire. The decision to proceed from here needs to be genuine and conscious. People will often use the word "guilt" to describe this motivation, but guilt can also cause you to avoid your conscience. Phrases like white guilt have come to mean "paralyzing and crippling someone into helplessness." It's taking someone *away* from the action to change the things that make them uncomfortable. That doesn't seem to be a helpful framing device. Obviously, feelings around racial injustice do not *have* to be paralyzing or crippling. Whether that is institutional or in personal acts of accountability, taking decisive action on racism is a vital part of many people's accountability.

Make no mistake, repentance is really difficult work. It's not a public apology followed by resuming your life. It's Dan Harmon spending six years and giving many lackluster apologies before understanding the deep-seated issues motivating his behavior at the

time and acknowledging them. In doing so *internally*, we become the kind of person that does not repeat harm in this way. It demands uncomfortable internal confrontations and lengthy introspection. It's lonely and cumbersome and often involves reading books with terrible covers (which was a motivating factor in our decisions surrounding this volume). And worst of all, you have to face the most unpleasant aspects of yourself.

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg was told a story about a man who, after being released from prison for raping his nephew, wrote to churches to obtain informed consent that they knew his history and would still allow him to pray there. He wanted to acknowledge his actions and prevent being trusted in a situation where an assault might happen again, facing great risk of rejection. The man's actions show taking responsibility for the hurt he caused as well as actionable ways to prevent it from happening again in the future.

Determine what ways you have to undo previous harms in the world around you. Not for show, but to align your values to your actions. Then when you are presented with the opportunity to make missteps like those in your past, you must make different choices. That is when you will know it's a good time to reach out and apologize to people you have harmed. You have proven to yourself your ability to change.

Perhaps the most obvious kind of atonement is helping other people who are facing similar struggles to your own. You have something to relate about. The entire peer counseling movement is built on the idea that it's easier to relate with someone who has lived experience similar to your own.

Much like how former detoxers make the best rehab counselors, someone called out for boundary violations who learned

from their mistakes could lead consent workshops, both as penance and to help others. There may not be an obvious road to repair, or it may feel scary and difficult, but it is there and it is the best path forward.

For some people, suffering leads them to pursue altruism. Great pain opens us up to empathy towards other people's suffering. Others move inward to avoid future pain, which is okay too.

There are two kinds of empathy. Cognitive empathy is figuring out how others feel. Emotional empathy is feeling how others feel. Compassion is concern for what others are going through. When these systems work together, the result is empathy, the belief that someone else's world is just as real as your own.

I relate with this altruistic sentiment and this is why I have agreed to so many mentoring relationships: Coming together as a group is one of the most consistently effective ways to help other people recover from their own trauma.

Shifting your priorities in this way is great, but it doesn't guarantee that certain people will ever trust you again. There was an artist that I supported for fifteen years, as both a patron and a cheerleader. One day the relationship went from warm to dark, when the artist encountered some second-hand gossip about me. The artist wasn't willing to talk about it, at least not with me, which felt hurtful and unfair. I tried to offer continued support regardless, as a form of atonement. One day, as part of another conversation, I sent a congratulations message about a success that the artist recently had. The artist interpreted the congratulations as me being smug, snide, and condescending. It became clear that trust no longer existed in the relationship even though there had never been conflict between us directly. I apologized for hurting the artist's feelings and took down

their paintings, but the well had been poisoned enough to undermine any good will.

Remember the story of Jibz Cameron shouting at the jogger? Just like we can't convince people that our value system is superior, we can't convince people that we are of better character than they perceive us as. We can only *show* them, through long term actions. And even then, other people may not see us the way that we see ourselves.

Why wouldn't someone accept an apology? You can see hundreds of various reasons throughout the previous chapters of this book—from it threatening their own personal narrative to cognitive distortions to the fact that aspects of yourself upset them in a deep fundamental way. Or maybe they just don't want to. They don't have to, after all. And while this can be disheartening, all that we can do is go on living our lives to be the people that we want and need to be.

It's easy to point the finger at celebrities (or even our friends) who harm others, judge them out loud, and suggest what they should do. But let's face it: we are all perpetrators. We have all watched ourselves say and do things that horrified us, hurt people that we care about deeply, and then we proceed to sweep it under the rug. It's much more difficult to hold ourselves to the same standards with which we judge others. And yet, that's the only thing that creates the change we all crave.

Fortunately, it's not our job to decide who has and has not repented and made amends, just to pay attention to our own experiences and make choices that align our values with our actions.

To grow and become whole again.

Future (Accountable) You

When we started work on this book, Faith posted a meme with Bigfoot captioned with "Believe in yourself, especially when no one else will." And that must be a guiding principle in your accountability work. Even if others will benefit and be thrilled, you're doing this work for you. Other people may not have the ability to believe in you right now. That can be confusing, painful, lonely, and difficult but ultimately it can help you see that only you have the power to actualize your own behavior. Let's look at some keys for achieving long term growth.

Hanging around the same people and places that you did during your darkest days and behavior that you weren't proud of will likely put your brain back into those same old habits. It's not to say that you have to get rid of all of your old friends, but sometimes they will pressure you into behaving in ways that you don't like or you will simply find yourself receding into muscle memory over accessing your thinking brain. Our social groups often support and reinforce our bad behavior, so it's an added challenge. Alcoholics Anonymous uses the slogan (meme!) "new spaces, new faces" for this reason.

What do you do when you feel that you have changed, but the people around you aren't supporting or respecting the changes? I grew up with a rowdy bunch of teenagers who would roam around and drunkenly cause trouble. The wildest member of the group, who had once skateboarded through a Wal Mart (when cornered by the manager in the lingerie section, he insisted that he was shopping for his mom), made a sudden departure from his ways in his early 20s and became a punk minister. At first, he withdrew from his friends, explaining that he feared that his religion wouldn't be respected because it wasn't a value

that others had. But slowly, over years, he reincorporated his old friends into his social circle.

Some weren't interested in reconnecting with him, but those who did recognized in him all of the things they remembered fondly from their teenage years. His personality was the same, plus he was more centered and just more whole as a human. And this minister has now brought his rambunctious sense of humor and radical politics to religious groups where it's powerfully making a splash. He found himself and his way.

By the time I turned 30, I found myself increasingly having differing views and a different mindset than the norms associated with the punk rock scenes I had been a part of for fifteen years. Each year I got older and saw things a bit differently, but they did not. In the late 90s, a trend started of penning punk rock retirement letters, an opportunity to outline all of the ways that the scene had failed someone. It didn't make sense to me then but it does now. There was a stagnancy I couldn't seem to come to terms with. Begrudgingly, I accepted that I had outgrown my former scene and no longer wanted any part of it. Previously, I had felt like I was being excluded from the inner sanctum of my group for unfair rhetoric that people didn't want to resolve. Now I felt like the scene didn't have a mechanism to resolve conflict. I recognized that I could maintain my values without my group and that these actions would speak louder than remaining.

Now, I am glad to no longer feel constrained by the scene's didactic politics. For many, the struggle becomes a wringing of hands, trying to apply the ideals of their youth to a world that is much more complex and far less black and white than those ideals can interface with. I watched person after person be ostracized for supporting someone that the scene had deemed not worthy of support—or simply because rumors had been spread about them and no one bothered to

check facts. I have witnessed too many conversations where someone was afraid that purchasing someone's $2 zine might be seen as a tacit endorsement of a potentially disagreeable statement made decades prior. Being part of a shrinking bubble where no one can manage to breathe for fear of failing to execute the appropriately perfect political gymnastics creates a very lonely world.

My world was small and lonely enough as it was, and besides, I felt that I had something to offer the world at large. Learning that there were other receptive communities outside of the only thing that I knew encouraged me at a crucial time to find new joy in my meaning and purpose. I realized that my work wasn't just for my own myopic scene but for everyone that cared to be involved.

Other people's choices and actions can act as a mirror, exposing things we don't want to see. But with that information we are empowered to make the difficult choices to go to new places. Remember, focusing on what you don't like about how others treat you only serves to grow that pain. Focusing on who you want to be and where you want to go grows those aspects of your person. Your focus shifts and evolves your thinking. As Einstein put it, "You can't solve a problem with the same consciousness that brought you there." You need to change your thinking to grow to new places. Doing so also prevents leaving your fate in the hands of strangers.

If you are facing stagnancy or finding that other people aren't noticing or respecting what you see as immense growth, it may be an issue of your own perspective. In 2003, I spent months having accountability conversations with a 32-year-old man who had been accused of pressuring numerous women into unwanted sexual contact. He had also been secretly dating a 16-year-old and instructed her to publicly deny that they were in a relationship. The man spent months downplaying his negative characterizations by only acknowledging the

most absurd rumors, to dismiss the absurdity of the accusations. He recited rhetoric yet seemed to have no interest in accountability work so I eventually let the relationship go.

Ever an optimist and a fan of second chances, I got in touch again while writing this book, fourteen years since our last conversation. The man, now 50, enthusiastically agreed to be interviewed and use his real name. I gritted my teeth when he quickly pointed out that it was legal for a 32-year-old man to date a 16-year-old girl in the state that he lived at the time, "however it was unethical."

The conversation continues like this for a week. When I asked the critical question for the *third* time, "Do you avoid dating women half your age *now*?" I got a sheepish "my current partner is in her mid-20s." I rolled my eyes and the individual in question registered some awareness of how his admission sounded, changing his mind and asking that his real name no longer be used, because mentioning that he still dated someone half his age "would tank [him] entirely." My observations during the conversation oscillate wildly between "Wow, he's really changed" to "Does he have any awareness of how much this is still a problem?"

I struggle a bit at the conflict between what behavior is socially unacceptable in any given group and what behavior violates our own values. This case has bad optics from any point of view. Within a power imbalance like this, it's the role of the more powerful person to understand that the other party may make choices now that they regret later because of how this power dynamic plays out over time.

During our interview, he explained how he had changed:

> *"Part of having privilege is not knowing what privilege is. Part of being entitled is not seeing how entitled you are. I, as a medium sized, tattooed, fairly fit, straight white male extrovert, am confident*

in expressing what I want or don't want. I have no problem asking for what I want and speaking up when I'm not 100% happy. So, I assumed everyone thought like this. I try to be more aware of my body language. I tried to talk less, but realized I was just trying to use fewer words, so I tried with better luck to listen more actively…I now have proactive conversations about *power imbalance…having a conversation in a neutral place with open ended questions…I'm seeking thoughts as opposed to dictating how the conversation goes. 'How do you feel about…' instead of 'Are you okay with…' I now try and put out my attraction in a matter-of-fact way and leave it to the woman to respond, as opposed to the idea of 'seeing how far I can get.' I don't bring up sexual or romantic activity unless and until she says or does something that expresses interest."*

It's important to remind ourselves that the goal isn't to judge others. It's to be our best selves and protect the vulnerable. That realization was a relief as it felt like my role was to judge this person, as if that is in any way appropriate or helpful. The important matter is that the current partner was content in the relationship and had been for several years. It wasn't the nice bow on the end of the story that we were hoping for, but in any case, the point is to remember that your personal growth is a murky, gray process. It doesn't have a clean beginning and ending. You won't transition from being a social pariah to being accountable. And in many ways you wouldn't want to. The idea that we would ever be "finished" growing is preposterous. Acknowledge that accountability is a spectrum of how much of your behavior aligns with your values. What percentage of the time is this happening? Wouldn't you prefer that your growth remain a continual, ongoing process?

I have spent years taking extensive notes about conflict within organizations. In 2018, I was involved with a group for adult autistics. On weekday afternoons, the group met in a private office. On

weekend evenings, the group met at an LGBTQ community center. One member sent an epic email about how the group was excluding straight members and hurting the autistic community because he felt uncomfortable going somewhere that he was not explicitly prioritized. The LGBTQ center meetings were not only for LGBTQ autistics, though roughly 70% of the group identified that way. Why did recentering the marginalized people in the group feel threatening? People are uncomfortable in environments where we aren't prioritized. Comedian and author W Kamau Bell explains "A white person in a Black space lacks trustworthiness. This is why white people avoid Black spaces. Who doesn't have this option?" As a person with privilege, having the rare experience of having to establish trust can feel frustrating and threatening, just like any other muscles that we don't exercise routinely.

It's okay to feel uncomfortable or any other way, of course. It's your first feeling. But reacting to those feelings and spending hours writing a book length email is likely not going to sway anyone to your point of view. For a few days and even during meetings, our mail server exploded into a volley of telling other people how they should feel and perceive the situation. It wasn't constructive. By the following meeting, the person who had sent the initial, epic email was kicked out of the group. He had violated boundaries and behavioral standards that the group held dear, like respecting each other and listening before reacting. It wasn't ideal but the alternative was to normalize his behavior as acceptable within the group, which would be much worse. Still, the experience opened up a magical, transformative door of greater discussion for the people who remained.

One woman told the story about how she learned social skills from joining a cult and living in close quarters after running away from her abusive parents. One woman explained that every time she thought that she had made a single friend, that person tried to sleep with her, so

she gave up and didn't socialize outside of our group or her job. Several transgender people spoke openly about their experiences, regrets, and observations regarding how friends and strangers treated them differently before and after they came out. One person told the story of how, after becoming male presenting, they were treated with greater respect and authority and how, as a feminst, this made them deeply uncomfortable and feel like a traitor to their values, so they transitioned gender again. And most magically of all, when I asked if I could share these stories with you, they consented and asked me if it was okay to share my stories as well.

Through the process of experiencing something rupturing and difficult together, the group has learned to trust each other. We shared things that we don't get a chance to talk about often in daily life. When someone said something that would usually be deemed as attacking another person's identity or worldview, a third person would say "I can see how you feel that way. I used to see things like that too. Here's some new information that I discovered that shifted my perspective." Even though I don't see those people weekly anymore, I still think of them as the people that I am closest to. They are some of the only people that I've met with relatable experiences to my own life. And we achieved something magical together. It felt like an evolved way of bridging conflict to make us closer through mutual respect and rules. I can't think of a bigger long-term success than that.

The goal of accountability isn't to control others but to live by our own values and manage conflict in a way that honors our relationships. The person who left the group was given the offer that they could rejoin if they could show that they understood why their behavior and reaction was against the values of the group. The rest of the group was able to live by our values privately and be accountable to each other, together, as a group. And the way that this conflict played

out demonstrated that behavior like this was unacceptable. This serves two roles: it shows members that they won't be rewarded for acting out and gives all members the comfort of knowing that they will not have to put up with that kind of bullshit.

In business, people talk about connecting the carrot to the stick, relating the reward to the behavior change. If you could save time or money, improve your quality of life, or simplify something exhausting, you are motivated to try something new based on the likelihood of desirable consequences. And this framing may feel like a good way to look at your own actions when you find yourself unsure how your behaviors are disassociating from your values as well as tracing your way back to the rewards of doing so.

If you still aren't sure about how you feel about something, spend a few minutes being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. Write them down. You'll see how your body knows how you feel more clearly than your thinking brain does. If you participate in a negative habit that you want to stop, being mindful will flood your brain with everything about it that disgusts you. For example, if you want to quit smoking, pay attention to the smells and flavors you dislike and your brain can ignore the chemicals to your brain and recognize what you find gross about it. You can shift your focus to change your behavior.

Becoming in touch with your own experience will help you to recognize which of your actions come from outside influences, and which stem from your own values. It'll help you to see who you are and where you want to go.

When you get stuck, you can try asking yourself exploratory questions:

- When do you find it easiest to express your feelings?

- What is the biggest risk you've ever taken?
- When did you feel most overextended?
- What causes you to act defensively? How would you like to respond instead?
- Where do you feel safest? Why?
- How have you changed in the past year? Why?
- What is empathy? Why is it important to you?
- How can you be a better listener?
- How can you support people that you've hurt?
- What is your definition of justice?
- How can you be transparent about your progress?
- What has been the most transformative experience in your life to date? How did it happen? What was meaningful about it?

CONCLUSION

You've done a lot of work in this book. Congratulate yourself. It's a lot to think about. If you are still feeling like you haven't connected all of the dots, don't beat yourself up. We'd say that doesn't signal failure, it signals the fact that you are recognizing that this is a complex and long-term process. We did create a workbook to go along with this to provide more structure for people who are into that kind of thinking, if that would be helpful for you (Microcosm Publishing, 2021).

And because it can't be overstated, we want you to remember that accountability is a fundamentally personal process. It's not about what others say you should or need to do, it's aligning your actions to your values and recognizing your impact on the world. It's recognizing that your intentions do not always have the intended impact and that that is what is most notable to others. Sometimes this is as simple as getting to know yourself, admitting your mistake, and apologizing. Sometimes it's a years-long process to understand your motivations and behaviors that you see inside yourself and feel like you have no control over to change your outward expressions and patterns. For habits that took years to form, it can take years to change them.

Most people spend years of their life finding that it's easier to get their wants met than their needs and having trouble prioritizing them as a result. By accepting these things, working to repair them, and learning how to prevent patterns from forming or continuing in the future, we become who we want to see ourselves as.

Accountability is understanding why others see you the way that they do and what part of that is within your power to change. And taking accountability is ultimately going to be one of the most

important actions that you can take in directing your life. Regardless of what attracted you to this book, please, do this work for yourself, not for other people or for specific relationships. If you're still breathing, it's not too late.

And if you think letting go of old thinking and patterns is difficult, wait until you see how difficult holding on to them was. Review, repeat, and challenge yourself every day.

Please send us your success stories.

REFERENCES

"6 Tips for Resolving Conflict Using NLP" *Unleash Your Potential*, 18 Apr. 2019, unleashyourpotential.org.uk/tips-for-resolving-conflict-using-nlp/.

Aldag, R. J., & Fuller', S. R. (1993). Beyond t'iasco: A reappraisal of the groupthink phenomenon and a new model of group decision processes. Psychological Bullatin, ll3, 553-552.

Archambault, J. (n.d.). Unfounded cases and false reports: A complex problem [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault: http://www.iowacasa.org/UserDocs/A3,_A4_

Archambault_FALSE_REPORTS.pdf Archambault, J. (2005, Winter). So how many rapes are false? STOP Newsletter. Retrieved from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape: http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/STOP_2005_False_Reporting.pdf

Archambault, J., & Lonsway, K. A., (2006). Dynamics of sexual assault: What does sexual assault really look like? (Rev. 2008 ed.). Available from End Violence Against Women International's On-Line Training Institute: http://evawintl.org/onlinetraining.aspx

Archambault, J., & Lonsway, K. A., (2007). Clearance methods for sexual assault cases (Rev. 2008 ed.). Available from End Violence Against Women International's On-Line Training Institute: http://evawintl.org/onlinetraining.aspx

Belknap, J. (2010). Rape: Too hard to report and

Aronson, E. (1988). Tha social animal. New York: Freeman.

Bandura, A. (1971) Social Learning Theory. N.Y. General Learning Press.

Bandura, A. (1973) Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis. NJ. Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1986) Social Foundations of Thought and Action. Engelwood Cliffs, NJ. Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A., Ross, D., and Ross, S. (1963) Imitations of aggressive film-mediated models. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 66: 3-11.

Bazerman, M. H. (2018). Judgment and decision making. In R. Biswas-Diener & E. Diener (Eds), *Noba textbook series: Psychology.* Champaign, IL: DEF publishers.

Beck, Judith S. *Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond*. The Guilford Press, 2021.

Bigler RS, Clark C. The inherence heuristic: a key theoretical addition to understanding social stereotyping and prejudice. Behav Brain Sci. 2014;37(5):483-4. doi:10.1017/S0140525X1300366X

Brown, C., & Augusta-Scott, T. (2007). Narrative therapy: Making meaning, making lives. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Crouch, Morgan. "What Are the Seven Techniques of Propaganda?" Synonym, 25 June 2018, classroom.synonym.com/what-are-the-seven-techniques-of-propaganda-12080912.html.

Curtis V. (2011). Why disgust matters. Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological sciences, 366(1583), 3478–3490. https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2011.0165

Eisler, Riane Tennenhaus. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. Harper & Row, 2019.

Evetts, Cynthia. "Fight or Flight Versus Tend and Befriend Behavioral Response to Stress." American Journal of Occupational Therapy, vol. 71, no. 4_Supplement_1, 2017, doi:10.5014/ajot.2017.71s1-po1127.

Fanon, F., Philcox, R., Sartre, J., & Bhabha, H. K. (2017). The wretched of the earth. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Finucane,M. L., Ali Alhakami, Paul Slovic, Stephen M. Johnson. The affect heuristic in judgments of risks and benefits. Journal of Behavioral Decision Making. 10 January 2000. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1099-0771(200001/03)13:1%3C1::AID-BDM333%3E3.0.CO;2-S

Gadotti, M., Gomez, M. V., & Freire, L. (2004). Lecciones de Paulo Freire: Cruzando fronteras: Experiencias que se completan. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

Galindo, L. A. (2009). *The 85% solution: How personal accountability guarantees success: No nonsense, no excuses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gardner, B., Lally, P., & Wardle, J. (2012). Making health habitual: the psychology of 'habit-formation' and general practice. The British journal of general practice : the journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners, 62(605), 664–666. https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp12X659466

Gass, Robert H., and John S. Seiter. "The Nature of Critical Thinking." Arguing, Reasoning, and Thinking Well, 2019, pp. 62–81., doi:10.4324/9781351242493-4.
Gerrig, Richard J. & Philip G. Zimbardo. Psychology And Life, 16/e Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright (c) 2002 by Pearson Education.
Gratton G, Cooper P, Fabiani M, Carter CS, Karayanidis F. Dynamics of cognitive control: Theoretical bases, paradigms, and a view for the future. *Psychophysiology*. 2018;55(3):10.1111/psyp.13016. Do
"Home." WOOP My Life, woopmylife.org/en/home.i:10.1111/psyp.13016
How Do You Create Personal Accountability in Your Life? (n.d.). Retrieved August 17, 2020, from https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/how-do-you-create-personal-accountability-in-your-life/
Janis, Irving L. Victims of Groupthink; a Psychological Study of Foreign-policy Decisions and Fiascoes. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1972.
Janis, Irving L. Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982.
Johnstone, L. & Boyle, M. with Cromby, J., Dillon, J., Harper, D., Kinderman, P., Longden, E., Pilgrim, D. & Read, J. (2018). The Power Threat Meaning Framework: Towards the identification of patterns in emotional distress, unusual experiences and troubled or troubling behaviour, as an alternative to functional psychiatric diagnosis. Leicester: British Psychological Society.
Kahneman, D. (1986). *Judgement under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.
Kilpatrick, D. G., Edmunds, C., & Seymour, A. (1992). Rape in America: A report to the nation. Retrieved from the Medical University of South Carolina, the Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center:http://www.musc.edu/ncvc/resources_prof/rape_in_america.pdf
Korteling JE, Brouwer AM, Toet A. A Neural Network Framework for Cognitive Bias. *Front Psychol*. 2018;9:1561. Published 2018 Sep 3. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01561
Kruse, K. (2020, January 13). Improve Personal Accountability: 12 Things To Do In 12 Weeks. Retrieved August 17, 2020, fromhttps://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2020/01/13/improve-personal-accountability-12-things-to-do-in-12-weeks/
Jordan, J. V. (1991). The movement of mutuality and power. Wellesley, MA: Stone Center, Wellesley College.
Jordan, J. V., Hartling, L. M., & Walker, M. (2004). The complexity of connection: Writings from the Stone Centers Jean Baker Miller Training Institute. New York: Guilford Press.
Jung, C. G. (1953). Psychology and alchemy. London: Routledge & K. Paul.
Jung, C. G., & Hull, R. F. (2008). On the nature of the psyche. London: Routledge.
Jung, C. G., & Pauli, W. (1955). The Interpretation of nature and the psyche. Synchronicity: An acausal connecting principle. New York: Pantheon Books.
Jung, C. G., & Read, H. (1976). Mysterium coniunctionis. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
Linehan, M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets*. New York: The Guilford Press.
Lisak, D., Gardinier, L., Nicksa, S. C., & Cote, A. M. (2010). False allegations of sexual assault: An analysis of ten years of reported cases. ViolenceAgainst Women, 16, 1318-1334. doi:10.1177/1077801210387747
Marcia, R. Accountability: A concept worth revisiting. (2019, October 03). Retrieved August 17, 2020, from https://www.myamericannurse.com/accountability-a-concept-worth-revisiting/
Marewski JN, Gigerenzer G. Heuristic decision making in medicine. *Dialogues Clin Neurosci*. 2012;14(1):77–89. PMID: 22577307
Oettingen, Gabriele. Rethinking Positive Thinking. Penguin Group US, 2015.
Patterson, Kerry; Grenny, Joseph; McMillan, Ron; andSwitzler, Al (2001) *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. New York: McGraw Hill
Phillips, D.P. (1974) The influence of suggestion on suicide: Substantive and theoretical implications of the Werther effect. American Sociological Review, 39, (Jun), 340-354.
Phillips, D.P. (1980) Airplane accidents, murder, and the mass media: Towards a theory of imitation and suggestion. Social Forces 58, 4: 1000-1024.
Phillips, D.P. (1982) The impact of fictional television stories on U.S. adult fatalities: New

evidence on the effect of the mass media on violence. American Journal of Sociology, 87, 6: 1340-1359.
Phillips, D.P. (1983) The impact of mass media violence on U.S. homicides. American Sociological Review, 48 (Aug): 560-568.
Porges, S. W. (2011). The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation. New York: W.W. Norton.
Rachlin, H. (2003). Rational Thought and Rational Behavior: a Review of Bounded Rationality: the Adaptive Toolbox. Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior, 79(3), 409–412. doi:10.1901/jeab.2003.79-409
Schulman, Sarah (2016) *Conflict is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair* Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp
Sellier AL, Scopelliti I, Morewedge CK. Debiasing training improves decision making in the field. *Psychol Sci*. 2019;30(9):1371-1379. doi:10.1177/0956797619861429
Sexual Assault. (n.d.). Retrieved September 24, 2020, from https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault
Sexual Harassment. (n.d.). Retrieved September 24, 2020, from https://www.eeoc.gov/sexual-harassment
Shah AK, Oppenheimer DM. Heuristics made easy: an effort-reduction framework. Psychol Bull. 2008;134(2):207-22. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.134.2.207
Staub R. Accountability and its role in the workplace. The Business Journal. January 13, 2005. www.bizjournals.com/triad/stories/2005/01/17/smallb3.html.
Taylor, S.E. (2002). The tending instinct: How nurturing is essential to who we are and how we live. New York: Holt.
Taylor, S. E.; Klein, Laura Cousino; Lewis, Brian P.; Gruenewald, Tara L.; Gurung, Regan A. R.; Updegraff, John A. (2000). "Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight". Psychological Review. 107 (3): 411–29.
"The '3.5% Rule': How a Small Minority Can Change the World." *BBC Future*, BBC, www.bbc.com/future/article/20190513-it-only-takes-35-of-people-to-change-the-world.
Turner, R.H. (1964) Collective behaviour. In R.E.L. Faris (ed.) Handbook of Modern Sociology (pp. 382-425) Chicago. Rand McNally.
Turner, R.H. and Killian, L.M.(1987) Collective Behavior (3rd ed.) NJ. Prentice-Hall.
Tyson, L. (2015). Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
Watkins, M., & Shulman, H. (2010). Toward psychologies of liberation. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Vaillant G. E. (2008). Positive emotions, spirituality and the practice of psychiatry. Mens sana monographs, 6(1), 48–62. https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-1229.36504
Van Eck, Clara A.. "Changing the Message: Battered Women's Advocates and Their Fight Against Domestic Violence at the Local,
State, and Federal Level, 1970s-1990s" (2017). Master of Arts (MA), thesis, History, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/bs1s-7187. https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/history_etds/7
Vlăduţescu, Ştefan. "Communicational Types of Propaganda." International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences, vol. 33, 2014, pp. 41–49., doi:10.18052/www.scipress.com/ilshs.33.41.
What's the origin of "Kilroy was here"?". The Straight Dope. 4 August 2000.
Wilson CG, Nusbaum AT, Whitney P, Hinson JM. Age-differences in cognitive flexibility when overcoming a preexisting bias through feedback. *J Clin Exp Neuropsychol*. 2018;40(6):586-594. doi:10.1080/13803395.2017.1398311
Yang R, Cui L, Li F, Xiao J, Zhang Q, Oei TPS. Effects of cognitive bias modification training via smartphones. *Front Psychol*. 2017;8:1370. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01370
Žeželj I, Lazarević LB. Irrational beliefs. *Eur J Psychol*. 2019;15(1):1-7. doi:10.5964/ejop.v15i1.1903

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Joe Biel is a self-made autistic publisher and filmmaker who draws origins, inspiration, and methods from punk rock and has been featured in *Time Magazine, Publisher's Weekly, Oregonian, Spectator (Japan), G33K (Korea), and Maximum Rocknroll*. Biel is the author of ten books and a hundred zines. joebiel.net

Faith Harper PhD, LPC-S, ACS, ACN is a bad-ass, funny lady with a PhD. She's a licensed professional counselor, board supervisor, certified sexologist, and applied clinical nutritionist with a private practice and consulting business in San Antonio, TX. She has been an adjunct professor and a TEDx presenter, and proudly identifies as a woman of color and uppity intersectional feminist. She is the author of dozens of books.